



ASSIGNMENT

GIVING VOICE TO THE UNHEARD

NATIONAL FOUNDATION MEDIA FELLOWSHIPS

The **Media Fellowship Programme** has been initiated by the National Foundation for India to bring development concerns more prominently into the public agenda and the domain of social conscience.

A **Committee** of media experts and development specialists has been constituted to advise and assist the foundation with the programme.

Four fellowships are awarded every year. The **amount** of each fellowship is Rs. 1,00,000.

The **theme** for 1995-96 and 1996-97 was the Girl Child.

The **duration** of the Fellowships given to the journalists is six months, spread over a year, if necessary.

The **terms** amongst others included publication of a minimum of ten articles over the duration of the Fellowship period.

The **eligibility** criterion for the Fellowship is:

- The Fellowship is open to journalists working in any of the regional and national dailies and associated media.
- Early to mid-career status with at least 3-5 years of professional experience as a journalist in the print media.
- A demonstrated personal commitment to a career in journalism.

The fellows are selected on the basis of a proposal to be submitted to the Foundation either directly or through a sponsoring editor. This proposal should outline the particular thematic area in which the applicant would like to work. This proposal should also include details regarding the specific geographical location of the study, the relevance of the theme selected, as well as the contribution it can make to the larger development debate in the country.

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Giving Voice to the Unheard

A selection of articles on Girl Child by
1995 NFI Media Fellows

1997

**National Foundation for India
New Delhi**

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"Majesty/Excellencies, We, the girl children of SAARC countries, appeal to you to give us the opportunity to become responsible citizens of our countries.

We, the girl children of SAARC countries, live in societies where we are less than equal. We are the victims of social injustice and discrimination. We also need love and care and the right to childhood. While we like to help our parents as much as possible, we also have a right to play and enjoy ourselves. Please protect us from exploitation, and give us opportunities to develop to our full potential physically, intellectually and emotionally. Protect us from early marriage and motherhood, for which we are not ready.

Thank you for making 1990 the SAARC Year of the Girl Child. This year has helped people think more about the special problems we have as girl children. We are confident that you will look into our problems and help us lead a better life.

Please create the conditions to bring us light and hope.

Our future lies in your hands.

Thank You."

APPEAL OF SEVEN GIRL CHILDREN MADE TO HEADS OF STATE/ GOVERNMENT IN 1990 LEADING TO THE DECLARATION OF "SAARC DECADE OF THE GIRL CHILD, 1991-2000".

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PREFACE

Media Fellowships on Girl Child – A Unique Initiative in Development Communication

The National Foundation for India provides a forum for people, whether of modest or magnificent means, to help carry out a broad variety of activities. The Foundation advocates a development process that is people-centred, equitable and sustainable, and one that encourages innovation, respect for democratic participation, pluralism and cultural diversity. It supports a large number of organizations engaged in non-profit activities with special emphasis on Population and Development - Gender Equity & Gender Justice; Sustainable Management of Natural Resources; Sustainable Livelihoods; Public Affairs and Urban Governance; North East Initiatives and Development Communications.

National Foundation for India is a fundraising and grantmaking foundation which supports meaningful grassroots development work across the country. It believes that development is about people and the quality of their life. People have needs and aspirations, some fundamental or basic and others that emerge as the society develops. The Foundation is committed to people-centred development.

The Foundation has an eminent Board of Trustees, drawn from the corporate sector, development organizations and academics. They include Dr M S Swaminathan, Chairman, Mr C Subramaniam, Founder Chairman, Dr Kamla Chowdhry, Mr S P Godrej, Ms Devaki Jain, Dr V Kurien, Begum Bilkees Latif, Mr Ratan Tata and Dr Manmohan Singh.

The Foundation lays great stress on networking between non-governmental social action groups, media, the corporate sector, academic and community-based institutions and on forging of partnerships between organizations sharing similar concerns.

The Foundation aims at channelising individual as well as corporate donations into development work, and has supported a number of projects in various parts of the country.

To promote effective communication that draws attention to development concerns, to encourage excellence in journalism, and facilitate a more informed development policy dialogue, the National Foundation for India has announced its fellows for the year 1996-97. The Foundation awards four Fellowships of Rs. 1.00 lakh each, every year. The Foundation launched the Media Fellowship Programme in 1995.

Specific objectives of the Fellowships are:

- to create awareness in the media about national developmental priorities
- to build public opinion regarding the need to take positive measures to support people centered development
- to facilitate a process of sensitization to developmental issues amongst media professionals
- to promote effective communication that draws attention to development concerns
- to encourage excellence in journalism and to facilitate a more informed development policy dialogue.

The theme for each set of Fellowships is derived from the Foundation's programme priorities. The theme for the Media Fellowships for the year 1996-97 was **Gender Equity and Gender Justice - in the context of the Girl Child**, as was in the first year of its launch.

The Fellowship is open to all middle level journalists, in the age group of 25-35, working in any of the English or regional language publications. In its first year, the Fellowships were awarded to Mr Nasiruddin Haider Khan, Ms. Paramita Livingstone, Ms. C.G. Manjula and Ms. Ammu Joseph.

In order to facilitate in designing and shaping up this programme, the Foundation is advised and assisted by an eminent committee of experts and development specialists also includes selection of the Fellows. The Advisory Committee is

chaired by Mr Chanchal Sarkar. Other members include Mr Gautam Adhikari, Mr D N Bezboruah, Mr Nikhil Chakravartty, Dr Kamla Chowdhry, Mr H K Dua, Ms Nirmala Laxman, Ms Usha Rai and Mr P Sainath.

The Foundation is trying to get some of these articles published in national papers, magazines to allow for a wider dissemination on the subject. It might be worth mentioning that one of the Foundation's priority programme areas is the North East - a region identified by the Foundation for special support with a focus to strengthen the voluntary sector and people's organizations in the process of development.

It was not just coincidence that the Fellowship went to three Fellows working in regional dailies writing in regional languages. It is a deliberate effort on the part of the Foundation to encourage "development journalism" in different parts of the country. The Foundation also feels after the first year's experience that it would like to award the Fellowship as a policy to mid career status journalists (25-35) who while having an interest in writing on socially relevant issues need the encouragement that a Fellowship gives not to mention the financial flexibility to write in depth and extensively on such issues.

The National Foundation Fellowship is a young Fellowship and the past years's experience has taught us a lot of lessons - good and bad. We consider that some of the critical issues should be debated nationally and regionally into the public conscience. Through the Fellowship we also seek to attach journalists to various people's organizations in the region of their work.

This year's awards were given away by Justice Ranganath Misra, Chairman, National Human Rights Commission at the India International Centre, New Delhi on 14th November, 1996. The awardees were Ms. Mamta Jaitly from Jaipur, Rajasthan, who runs a registered newspaper for neo-literates called "Ujala Chadi"; Ms. Nivedita Jha who works with Dainik Rashtriya Sahara, in Patna, Bihar; Ms. Sharmila Joshi, who works as a special correspondent for the Women's Feature Service in

Bombay; and Ms. Meena Menon, who is now freelance journalist, working from Bombay.

In this book, we have attempted to bring together a glimpse of the kind of work that has been possible due to the Fellowship. Materials were originally written in different languages, but that vernacular medium of communication is and should not be a barrier is what makes us believe that we can bring innovative communications to a wider audience, especially policy makers.

We already have all the write-ups translated in English and thus is available for reuse and re-release in other languages. We would be happy to work out possibilities of wider outreach through direct media republication as well as through informal newsletters, journals etc. This volume represents the culmination of painstaking research and several hours of careful editing and follow up efforts by the Programme Staff of the Foundation. In particular I would like to place on record the invaluable input of C.P. Jayalakshmi and able support of Sunita Bhadauria and Rupsa Malik.

SHANKAR GHOSE
Executive Director

Ammu Joseph

Selected Articles :

- 1. Am I the Right Age for Anything?**
- 2. The World According to Adolescents.**
- 3. Whose Choice is it anyway?**

Ms Ammu Joseph's belief is that it is important to evolve strategies to psychologically empower the girl child while simultaneously dealing with the more obvious often lethal impediments in her path. Her locale of study has been the four southern states of India. According to her, the main reason she applied for the Fellowship and was glad to accept it was "... it would give me the opportunity to delve deeper into one particular aspect of the growth and development of the girl child than is normally possible for a journalist". Ammu wrote a series of articles which have a continuum. However, we have selected only three of them for want of space.



The following text is extremely blurry and illegible. It appears to be a list or a series of paragraphs, but the content cannot be discerned. The text is organized into several lines and possibly paragraphs, but the individual words and sentences are unreadable.

AM I RIGHT AGE FOR ANYTHING?

Until recently, the very existence of the adolescent girl as a social entity went largely unacknowledged. Undergoing the transition from childhood into adulthood, neither full-fledged women nor bonafide children in the accepted sense, the adolescent girl seems to be nobody's child-woman. AMMU JOSEPH highlights different aspects of the lives of girls calling attention to the importance of addressing the full range of their many needs.

With the women's movement and the child rights movement converging to highlight the precarious condition of the female human being, from infancy to adulthood, the girl child has received some official and public attention over the past few years.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) declared a Year and a Decade of the Girl Child (1990 and 1991-2000). Subsequently, the Government of India announced a National Plan of Action for the Girl Child, 1991-2000. While the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) does not specifically mention the girl child, it seeks to promote the rights and entitlements of all children irrespective of differing characteristics, including sex. The Programme of Action of the UN's International Conference on Population and Development (1994) devotes a section to the girl child. And the Platform for Action of the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) goes further with a whole chapter on the girl child.

Although the child is internationally defined as a human being below the age of 18, the spotlight has hitherto been trained

mainly on female children at the younger end of the age spectrum, partly because their very survival is often at stake. The meagre literature that exists on the situation of the adolescent girl in India reflects the neglect of this age group (taken here as 12-18), with repeated references to the lost or wasted years of adolescence.

When adolescent girls are brought into focus, it is generally in the context of health, particularly reproductive health — for obvious reasons. Even here, as healthcare professionals themselves admit, adolescents are “medical orphans,” with neither paediatricians nor gynaecologists nor other physicians perceiving them as their primary clientele.

The emphasis hitherto on the physical survival of the girl child and the health status of both the girl child and the adolescent girl is understandable because the most glaring evidence of gender-based discrimination, beginning in (and sometimes even before) infancy, can be seen on and in their bodies.

2 Apart from the fact that practices like sex-selective abortion and infanticide snuff out thousands of nascent female lives, gender-based neglect in nutrition and healthcare result in abnormally high mortality rates among girl children, especially in the under-five age group. According to a UNICEF publication, “Glimpses of Girlhood in India,” about a quarter of the approximately 12 million girls born in India every year do not survive to see their 15th birthday. Despite being biologically stronger than boys, almost 300,000 more girls die annually. It is estimated that every sixth female death is specifically due to gender-based discrimination.

More females than males die at every age level up to 35 years in India. This continuing, unnatural gap in the mortality rates of Indian males and females has been identified as the main reason for the country’s perverted sex ratio, which has declined from 972 (women to 1000 men) in 1901 to 927 in 1991. In some states the sex ratio is even more scandalous, well below the national average: 865 in Haryana, 879 in Uttar Pradesh and 882 in Punjab. Only Kerala, with a sex ratio of 1036, conforms to the global norm.

Apart from this, girls suffer disproportionately from malnutrition and health problems emanating from this debilitating condition. While it is true that malnutrition and ill-health dog all human beings living in poverty, it is undeniable that the low social status accorded to females in most societies results in greater levels of physical deprivation among girls and women, particularly within families engaged in a daily struggle for subsistence.

A 1974 economic analysis of malnutrition among young children in Punjab found that gender was the most statistically significant determinant of nutritional status even though male-female differentials were most marked among lower socio-economic and caste groups. Some studies have found that girl infants are actually breastfed less frequently, for shorter durations and over shorter periods than boys. Others have revealed that, while girls tend to be weaned earlier than boys, they get short shrift in both the quantity and the quality of complementary food. Evidence unearthed by some studies suggest that boys tend to receive more and better quality food than their sisters.

Intra-family discrimination in food allocation is not something cooked up by researchers, as some people imply. Conversations with groups of adolescent girls in different pockets of the southern Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala — where the overall status of women is reputedly better than in most northern states — revealed that they are well aware of such discrimination.

Although it is clearly too painful for most of them to disclose parental bias in the fulfilment of this most basic of human needs, many girls (especially in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh) freely admit that choice items of food are generally reserved for male family members, usually on the ground that their nutritional requirements are greater.

The trauma of acknowledging even to themselves the grim reality of gender-based discrimination in their lives — especially in relation to a need as fundamental as nutrition — was

poignantly demonstrated by the response of Savitri, a young girl now studying in the Mahila Shikshana Kendra (MSK) run by the A.P. Mahila Samatha Society in Sangareddy town, Medak District: any question relating to her life before she came to the MSK was met with a flood of tears.

Now in an environment where she is learning to value herself as a human being, she is also, for the first time, beginning to acknowledge and confront rather than ignore and accept the injustice of such discrimination. Hurtful as the process clearly is, there are signs that Savitri's current anguish is already paving the way to inner strength as well as a determination to overcome the odds against not only herself but also other girls like her.

Large-scale surveys tend to suggest that the prevalence of malnutrition among boys and girls is similar, but more intensive, small scale studies demonstrate that there are significant and consistent differences in the nutritional status of the two sexes.

4 For instance, a 1994 study by the International Centre for Research on Women found that more Indian girls (45 per cent) were stunted than their male counterparts (20 per cent). A 12-year-long study by the Institute of Health Management in Pachod, Maharashtra, revealed that the percentage of severely malnourished female children was consistently two to three times higher than that of boys. Studies conducted in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras showed that there was a higher proportion of girls than boys in Grades II and III of malnutrition. A 1994 study in Gujarat found that the prevalence of anaemia in adolescent girls was a shocking 98 per cent.

It is not surprising that the growing concern about the adolescent girl centres around her health status — although, as eminent paediatrician Dr. Shanti Ghosh admits in an article entitled, “Adolescence - The Crucial Years,” there is still very little information and research on adolescent health.

An important reason for providing nutritional and healthcare inputs to this age group is that adolescence represents a period of active growth and provides a “second opportunity” to make

good the ill-effects of childhood undernourishment. Studies have shown that, if fed adequately during this period, girls are likely to experience “catch-up” growth and achieve adult sizes comparable to children who have received better nourishment throughout childhood and adolescence.

This becomes all the more important as despite legislation against child marriage, a large proportion of girls continues to be pushed into early marriage, consummated almost immediately after menarche. The 1981 Census found that the mean age at marriage of “currently married women” in the country as a whole was 16.7. Of the 4.5 million marriages that reportedly take place in India every year, three million apparently involve girls in the 15-19 age group. In some parts of the country, girls are married at even younger ages. The relevant 1991 Census figures are not yet available but, going by other related trends, the situation is unlikely to have changed dramatically over the past decade.

Many of the girls met in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh felt quite trapped by the very real prospect of early marriage. Although to some marriage seemed to hold out a ray of hope that life would change for the better — especially since, as marriageable girls, their freedom and mobility were strictly curtailed — most viewed it as an inescapable part of their destiny. But a significant number were also eager for guidance on how they could at least postpone the inevitable.

In terms of health, premature marriage and childbirth are clearly disastrous. For one, young girls bearing children are at obstetric risk because their skeletal and reproductive systems are immature. In addition, the nutritional intake they require for normal growth and development gets diverted by pregnancy. As a result, girls who bear children before the end of the adolescent growth spurt are likely to remain physically underdeveloped. The situation is made worse by the fact that the girls who get pushed into early marriage are generally those who receive inadequate nutrition in the first place.

Not only are pregnancy-related complications common among

teenage mothers but the sudden upswing of female deaths in the 15-19 age group bears testimony to the high mortality rate of teenage motherhood. Medical complications resulting from pregnancy and childbirth have been found to be the main cause of death for this age group worldwide. It is significant that the sex ratio in India drops from 944 in the 5-9 age group to 912 in the 15-19 age group.

There are several other physical problems associated with early marriage and pregnancy: multiple pregnancies inadequately spaced, premature births, underweight babies, higher risk of infant mortality and the vicious circle formed. And these problems are exacerbated by the fact that most girls are provided with little accurate information about their own bodies, let alone given sex education, before they are plunged into marriage.

Although all these are very real problems that need to be urgently tackled, the overwhelming concern with the reproductive health of adolescent girls — so evident in many of the current interventions — suggests a preoccupation with population control rather than an abiding interest in their overall well-being. For instance, a joint statement issued by three international organisations on the need to pay heed to the health of adolescent girls calls attention to the fact that one of the “more universal consequences of early and more frequent child-bearing is the increase in population size and growth rate.”

The recent discovery of the adolescent girl as a social entity has spawned a number of programmes — initiated by the government as well as non-governmental organisations — that target this age group. At present most tend to focus narrowly on her healthcare requirements and, to a more limited extent, her need for skill-development. But something is certainly better than nothing. And perhaps there is scope for incorporating into these fledgling programmes a more holistic approach that views the adolescent girl as a complete human being whose overall development — physical, mental and psychological — must become a matter of serious public concern.

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO ADOLESCENTS

Conversations with adolescent girls in different parts of the southern states of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu reveal unforeseen similarities, as well as expected differences, in their experiences and perceptions of girlhood and the adolescence.

The term adolescence comes from the Latin word “adolescere,” which literally means “grow to maturity.” This implies that the period of adolescence is one during which the child is slowly transformed into a mature adult. It is clear that this process involves biological, intellectual and psychological change. Yet, the growth into maturity of adolescent girls in India is acknowledged almost exclusively in terms of physiology, with the onset of puberty signalling the moment at which a girl, now capable of reproduction, ceases to be a child and becomes a woman.

Of course, for the majority of Indian girls childhood is nothing like the carefree, idyllic ideal of the middle and upper class imagination, with many having to pitch in with sibling care, other household duties and, often, even wage work from a very early age. According to a study on “Growing up in Rural India: Problems and Needs of Adolescent Girls,” conducted by the Centre for Social Research in 12 villages of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, most girls seem to jump straight from childhood into adulthood. Many assume adult roles in the family even before the onset of puberty, taking responsibility for household and childcare tasks and, in addition, working in the fields.

These girls, too, experience the joys and pains of growing up. These may vary depending on geographic location, economic

circumstances and, most significantly, the social and cultural environment in which they find themselves. Conversations with groups of adolescent girls in different parts of the southern Indian states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh reveal unforeseen similarities, as well as expected differences, in their experiences and perceptions of girlhood and adolescence.

The girls with whom the conversations took place ranged from affluent girls in relatively cosmopolitan Kochi, girls from middle and lower middle class families in Thiruvella and Alappuzha (some from dalit communities) and girls from low-income fishing and tribal communities in Thiruvananthapuram and Kochi respectively (all in Kerala) to girls belonging to predominantly low-income and scheduled caste or tribe families from villages in Salem and Dharmapuri districts (Tamil Nadu) and Mahbubnagar, Medak and Rangareddy districts (Andhra Pradesh), as well as lower middle class girls in the old city of Hyderabad.

The conversations revolved mainly around their experience of and feelings about growing up female in their specific social milieus in the hope that this would afford glimpses into their self-image and grant some insights into their self-esteem and self-confidence levels. The idea was to explore the factors that could influence the development of self-image, self-esteem and self-confidence in young girls.

The most startling and saddening revelation to emerge from the conversations is that all the girls, virtually without exception, had often wished they had not been born female. Most of them could not think of any advantage attached to being female — except, significantly (with respect to their sense of self), that as girls they were able to help, love and look after their parents. On the other hand, they could easily point out several disadvantages associated with their gender.

At their age, understandably, the most aggravating aspect of being female seems to be the curtailment of their freedom and mobility, especially from the pre-adolescent stage onwards. This was a universal complaint voiced by all the girls, irrespective

of location and socio-economic or cultural background. Interestingly, many girls used the evocative words “swathanthriam” and “aazaadi” (both meaning freedom) to describe what they lacked. The denial or absence of freedom was the main and most galling difference they perceived between boys and girls.

“Boys have more ‘adhikaram’ (authority) and more ‘avakasham’ (rights),” said Sandhya, a vocal teenager from an economically weak but urbanised tribal community in Kochi. According to her, boys are not only more mobile than girls of their own age but actually more free to come and go than adult women, who generally need permission from male family members — sometimes even their own sons — to move about.

Girls from this community, like most of their counterparts in the state irrespective of socio-economic status, are allowed to go to school and tutorials, usually travelling in groups, but have to come straight home after classes. There is no question of going anywhere else except with adult family members.

According to Cuckoo, Anna and Priyanka, high school students in elite English-medium institutions, who live in a genteel residential area in Kochi, the bane of their lives is gossip, the threat of which makes their otherwise sensible and reasonable parents keep an uncomfortably tight rein on them. They chafe at restrictions on their mobility as well as the strict dress code to which they are expected to conform.

For girls in Salem district, the mobility problem is even more acute and affects their access to education. While most of them get to attend primary school, generally located fairly close to home, many are subsequently forced to drop out — even if they are doing well in their studies — because attending middle and high school usually involves travel to a bigger village or town.

“We girls are just imprisoned at home,” said Mangammal, an extraordinarily bright and vivacious girl in V. Mettur, a small, remote village in Salem district. Many of the girls here and their counterparts in Reddiyur, a somewhat larger and better-endowed village in the same area, said decisions about their

education as well as other aspects of their lives are often dictated by their elder brothers rather than their parents, possibly because of the family's dependence on financial contributions from the eldest son.

While primary school drop-outs in Kombur, a scheduled tribe village in Dharmapuri district, are engaged as child labour in the tile and brick factories as well as a mill that have recently come up in the neighbourhood, in many villages adolescent girls are simply kept house-bound, performing domestic chores in their natal home until they are relocated to undertake the same tasks in their marital home.

This sheer waste of their human potential at a time when these girls are full of youthful abilities, energy and enthusiasm is both deeply tragic at the personal level and a colossal folly at the societal and national levels.

The girls are aware that the restrictions placed on them are meant primarily to safeguard their all-important “reputation.” As far as society is concerned, they say, the most valued attribute in a girl is what is known as “good character,” best demonstrated by socially acceptable behaviour (“swabhaavam”). Anything that could give the impression that their character and behaviour are not quite up to the socially defined mark is, therefore forbidden.

According to them, girls are expected to be quiet, sensible, hard-working, well-behaved, obedient and, above all, unassertive. As Anna put it, the same behaviour that in a boy would be seen as “smart” would be deemed “over-smart” in a girl.

Sandhya and her friends suggest that their mobility is inhibited by the fear inculcated in them from childhood — fear of gossip and fear of violence. Almost all the girls admitted that reports of atrocities against women make them nervous and diffident. They are well aware of crimes like rape, wife battering and dowry-related violence, to which many girls and women fall victim.

The recent, infamous Suryanalli case — in which an adolescent girl was tricked into accompanying a man who not only raped her but passed her on to others in different parts of the state (the most well-known example of an alarming, seemingly new phenomenon that has come to be locally known as “relay rape”) — has made girls in Kerala, extremely conscious of their vulnerability.

But apart from the possibility of outright violence, there is the ever-present reality of sexual harassment on the streets (euphemistically known as eve-teasing), which also plays a major role in diminishing girls’ mobility. Virtually every girl has experienced some form of sexual harassment in the public sphere. While some say the boys and men of their own community or neighbourhood do not harass them, others complain that even local boys, including those younger than them, indulge in eve-teasing.

Although they seem to regard sexual harassment as an inescapable irritant, their responses to it vary. Some, like Sandhya in Kochi, say they talk back to their tormentors in an effort to shame or shock them into silence. Others say they prefer to ignore these roadside romeos because they believe the slightest attention, even when it is negative, only serves to encourage them. Also, they are afraid of further and more severe harassment if they publicly humiliate such aggressors through their retorts. And they are not confident of public support in such an eventuality.

But, either way, the phenomenon of sexual harassment is a constant source of tension on the streets and other public spaces. The daily dilemma of deciding how to deal with it is not only stressful but wasteful of valuable time and energy. In addition, the threat and fact of such harassment both restrict their freedom and contribute towards making them more timid than they would otherwise be.

These are just some of the many problems faced by adolescent girls as they grow into maturity. It is clear that, for these girls the curtailment of their freedom and mobility and the reasons

underlying the restrictions placed on them are extremely important issues. Even if they get all the nutrition, healthcare and education they require and deserve, unless these seemingly less pressing problems are also tackled, adolescent girls will continue to be unfairly shackled and thereby prevented from realising their full human potential.

Unfortunately, while the physiological aspects of adolescence are beginning to generate concern, the psychological and social aspects of growing up in India today seem to receive little attention from any quarter. Few of the limited number of programmes for adolescent girls now being devised and implemented seem to adequately address the kind of issues the girls themselves highlight.

Since both governmental and non-governmental programmes for adolescent girls in India are still in their infancy, there is scope for incorporating the insights gained from these conversations — which could be corroborated and amplified through more systematic study — so that a wider range of the felt needs and problems of their “target group” are effectively addressed.

As some writers have pointed out in the book, “Adolescent Girl - An Indian Perspective,” edited by Dr. Sunil Mehra, “The psychological and social impact of puberty on young people and those around them are dependent on the social and cultural milieu” and those working with adolescents need “to re-examine their interventions and contribute to integrate larger socio-cultural aspects which shape lives of individuals.”

WHOSE CHOICE IS IT ANYWAY?

On the importance of Fostering self-esteem to bring about real, sustain-able change in the lives of adolescent girls and the women they will grow into.

In the war of expletives and explosives, not to mention cowardung, over the recent Miss World pageant there has been much talk among those supporting the event about contestants' personal freedom and right to choose, as well as the side-benefits of self-confidence and self-esteem that accrue to beauty queens and, through them, to other girls and women.

Yet Sushmita Sen, who reached the top of the beauty ladder in 1994 when she was crowned Miss Universe, reportedly resorted to dangerous silicon implants to further perfect her body to better fit the beauty mould created by the beauty-fashion-entertainment industries, of which beauty contests are an integral part. This is surely not a sign of self-confidence and self-esteem?

The fact is that these terms are little understood, loosely used and often manipulated to serve ends inimical to their true meaning. For instance, conservative forces would defend Roop Kanwar's right to choose "sati" but oppose her right as a widow to lead an independent life, with or without remarriage. Similarly, many proponents of choice vis a vis beauty contests and modelling careers would be horrified if a daughter, sister or even friend chose to marry someone from the bottom of the caste-class heap or freely opted for a same-sex life partner.

Even the women's movement in India, understandably preoccupied with its uphill struggle to establish and defend women's equal status as human beings and as citizens, has had

scarcely a moment to address itself to the complex issues relating to self-image, self-worth, self-esteem and self-confidence. This can at least partly explain why some of its hard-won and important victories have failed to make a significant difference to the lives of the majority of women and girls.

Nearly 18 years have passed since the first “dowry death” or “bride-burning” cases hit the headlines, thanks to women’s groups, and more than 12 years have gone by since fresh legislation relating to dowry was passed by Parliament, mainly in response to demands from women’s organisations. Yet, today, newspapers are still studded with daily reports of young women harassed, done to death or taking their own lives on account of dowry, with few of their tormentors or murderers being brought to book. And the pernicious practice itself continues unabated — with the stakes, in fact, regularly rising — bringing ruin to many families and playing a major role in diminishing girls’ image of themselves as well as their status within families and in society.

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It is now 16 years since women’s organisations launched a nationwide campaign against rape, challenging popular myths that obstruct justice in cases involving this violent crime and eventually succeeding in getting the relevant law amended. Yet the Supreme Court (SC) judgement in the Suman Rani case, delivered six years after the new legislation was passed, and the Rajasthan High Court judgement in the Bhanwari Devi case, in the recent past, reflected the same bias and lack of understanding evident in the original SC verdict which had sparked off women’s protests.

In addition, not only is rape more common than ever but it is claiming fresh victims (little children, for example) and assuming new forms (for instance, the infamous “relay rape” phenomenon that has lately come to light in Kerala, in which girls are kidnapped, sold and abused as sex slaves by a succession of men, including the prominent and the powerful). Apart from this, fear of rape continues to shackle almost all girls and women, considerably restricting their freedom, mobility and options.

Similarly, a decade has passed since the discovery of the blatant misuse of medical diagnostic techniques to reveal the sex of the foetus and prevent the birth of daughters, which led to a concerted campaign by women and men against female foeticide that eventually resulted in a nationwide law. But the practice of sex selective abortion is not only as prevalent as ever but it is spreading far and wide and actually offering a modern alternative to female infanticide.

And despite the furore against the revival of the barbaric custom of burning widows on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands and the passage of a fresh law against the practice and its glorification — eight years ago — people still queue up to worship at the “sati sthal” in Deorala where Roop Kanwar met her fiery end in 1987. The recent acquittal of the accused in the case can only reinforce the ennobling myths that have been built up around the tragic death of the 18-year-old, educated, affluent, newly married girl who, it is claimed, “voluntarily chose to become a ‘sati’ against the advice of family elders.”

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As the French saying goes, the more things change, the more they seem to stay the same. The realisation, born out of experience, that there are limits to the usefulness of legislative and policy reform has led to the adoption of the concept of empowerment to enable women to bring about the changes they want in their own lives. Unfortunately, in its application, the concept is often tailored or diluted to fit others’ — often well-meaning — notions of what changes are required. Moreover, it has still not been properly incorporated into programmes for adolescent girls.

It is perhaps only to be expected that in a country with so many illiterate and poor people (especially women) education and income generation occupy pride of place in the women and development lexicon. There is no doubt that these are crucial capacities. But the situation of women in Kerala — the state which boasts the highest female literacy, the lowest number of households below the poverty line, the highest level of human development and so on — provides ample proof that literacy/

“Only a person or a nation self-confident in the best sense of the word is capable of listening to the voice of others and accepting them as equal to oneself.”

—Czechoslovakian playwright and statesman Vaclav Havel in his first presidential address

education and employment do not, in and by themselves, guarantee freedom and equality.

A pilot study by Sr. Alice Lukose and her WIN team on the experiences of young women from Kerala who had worked as migrant labour in seafood processing industries in various

states along the coastline provides an interesting indication of this. Although working and living conditions in the processing factories are often subhuman, most of the girls were quite positive about the impact of their work experience outside the state on their personal growth (decision-making capacity, independence, self-confidence and self-reliance) as well as on their status within their families and in society. It is telling that, despite the prison-like conditions in their work places, the girls said they experienced more freedom and independence away from their families and communities.

One of the reasons for the neglect of issues relating to self-image, self-esteem and self-confidence in the quest for women's emancipation in India may be the assumption that these are luxuries that women struggling for basic survival can ill afford. Another may be the perception that these are frivolous preoccupations emanating from the self-centred, individualistic worldview of modern Western societies.

But, as well-known feminist journalist Gloria Steinem points out in her book, “Revolution from Within: A Book of Self-Esteem,” the concept is as old and universal as humanity itself, with words for it in almost every language, including our many tongues (versions of “swabhiman”). Further, according to Steinem, serious social problems can be traced to the absence of self-esteem.

This fact was established by the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility, set up by the state legislature some years ago, which defined self-esteem as “Appreciating my own worth and importance and having the character to be accountable for myself and to act responsibly toward others.”

Despite media ridicule, the 25-member body of ten women and 15 men — representing the spectrum of races in the USA and a wide variety of professions and persuasions — commissioned expert studies and held statewide public hearings which together served to underscore the fact that low self-esteem was “a primary causal factor” in several major areas of social concern: crime and violence, alcohol and drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, child and spousal abuse, chronic welfare dependency and failure in educational achievement.

According to Steinem, the knowledge that one is loved and lovable, valued and valuable as one is, regardless of what one does, is the beginning of the most fundamental kind of self-esteem, which she calls “core” self-esteem, that begins to develop from infancy onwards. Next comes the more externalised kind of self-esteem, which psychologists call “situational,” and which comes from knowing that one is good “at” something, compares well with others, meets other people’s expectations, can complete ever more challenging and interesting tasks for the sheer joy of it, and so on. The two are obviously inter-related. As Steinem puts it, “Like two sources that flow into one river, they are separate only at the beginning ... self-esteem, like everything else about the growing human organism, is developmental.”

She warns that families and cultures which do not foster core self-esteem and then ration out situational approval in return for obeying, fitting in, serving the parents’ or group’s purpose and doing tasks that are always assigned instead of chosen — produce persons who feel there must be something wrong with their own interests and abilities. They begin to create what psychologists call a “false self” in order to earn inclusion and approval, to avoid punishment and ridicule.

For example, she says, the small boy who is told to do such impossible things as “be the man of the house,” is teased and humiliated for showing his vulnerabilities or is aggrandised and worshipped for a superiority he knows is unreal, often begins the elaborate construction of an “inflated” self, which results in the mostly male problem known as narcissism (or egotism). Conversely, the little girl who is brought up feeling inferior, is discouraged from exploring her own strength or is punished for willfulness and praised for assuming a docility and smiling sweetness she doesn’t feel, often begins to construct a “deflated” self, which results in the mostly female problem of depression.

The idea for this book came to Steinem when, after years of working on external barriers to women’s equality, she had to admit that there were equally important internal barriers, too. “Wherever I travelled,” she says, “I saw women who were smart courageous and valuable, who didn’t think they were smart, courageous and valuable — and this was true not only for women who were poor or otherwise doubly discriminated against, but for supposedly privileged and powerful women, too. It was as if the female spirit were a garden that had grown beneath the shadows of barriers for so long that it kept growing in the same pattern, even after some of the barriers were gone.”

She researched and wrote the book after finding that the current crop of books and articles on self-esteem focus exclusively on either the inner or the outer part of change. According to her, the former type contain important messages about the worth of each human being but barely mention the external structures that undermine this worth in order to assure their own authority. At the same time, she says, the latter variety tell women how to look better, deal with stress better and succeed in their many roles, but rarely mention that women’s self-esteem might be damaged by the very expectation of fulfilling all those roles or that, if success alone could create self-esteem, “there wouldn’t be so many powerful men out there whose appetite for ever more success is insatiable, precisely because they feel an inner void that can’t be filled.” Apart from that, she notes, there is

a tendency in many of these self-help publications to place even more of a burden on the individual.

Although this genre of “pop-psych” books has not yet spawned many local versions, some glossy magazines and newspaper supplements here are increasingly proffering advice on how to look, dress, walk, talk and party better, how to resolve a crisis, how to be confident, and so on, as a friend recently pointed out. Clearly such superficial counsel, which suggests that appearance is all, is nothing more than cosmetic surgery extended to the psyche.

However, there are encouraging signs that the importance of self-esteem in bringing about real, sustainable changes in women’s lives is gaining recognition in India. For example, Mahila Samakhya (MS), a major central government-initiated programme of education for women’s empowerment, currently on stream in six states (with a couple more on the anvil), strives to incorporate self-confidence and self-esteem building components into its activities, including interactions with young girls at the non-formal education centres and Mahila Shikshana Kendras it runs.

Lakshmi Krishnamurthy of Alaripu (Delhi), who has been closely involved with the programme since its inception in the late 1980s, describes self-esteem or “swabhiman” as self-respect minus pride. According to her, MS attempts to empower women by encouraging them to be self-confident, articulate (verbally as well as emotionally), spontaneous, creative and unafraid of authority.

In its educational efforts, MS tries to place as much emphasis on life skills as on literacy-related skills. In the latter category it endeavours to go beyond the conventional three Rs to incorporate essential skills like speaking, listening, reflecting/thinking and questioning. In the former it lists crucial competencies such as: trust/faith in oneself and others, treating others (not just elders) equally and with respect, being sensitive to others’ point of view, getting on and cooperating with others, controlling one’s anger/temper, making decisions and

becoming aware of the self as well as the environment (physical, social, economic and political) and the inter-relationships between these.

As an internal discussion paper on the MS educational experience puts it, to speak freely, to question without fear, to trust in oneself, to have faith in others, to be empathetic — all call for a level of self-awareness, confidence and esteem which not many people (least of all women) have. The development of these life skills not only facilitates the acquisition of literacy skills but also enhances the quality of skills acquired. Yet the building up of these essential qualities is commonly left to the vagaries of chance. To make matters worse, the real world (which includes the formal education system) often does a great deal to corrode what confidence and esteem people may possess.

Empowerment through education is, of course, not an easy or quick process. Describing the experience of evolving an empowering curriculum and teaching methodology for girls and women studying in the Mahila Shikshana Kendra in Banda, Uttar Pradesh, Renuka Mishra of Nirantar (Delhi) said, “It takes time to break the blocks to their self-esteem, the internalised idea that they are somehow not good enough — both at the individual level and also because they are girls.”

In another context, Vibha Parthasarathi, principal of the co-educational Sardar Patel Vidyalaya (Delhi), in a paper titled, “Socialisation, Women and Education: An Experiment,” describes the school’s multi-pronged attempts to foster gender sensitivity and equality within the school community, primarily by highlighting the individuality of girls and their essential personhood. This includes efforts to help boys accept a new status for girls in a climate of mutual respect and equality — which, in turn, involves countering the irrational premium often placed on boys or their ascribed superiority.

According to Parthasarathi, “Building a desired self-image is...(a) tool I bring to the fore as often as possible. Girls have been brought up to believe in their inferiority, helplessness and

dependence. They fear having to make a decision, to assert and insist. They are brought up to be beautiful brides, competent housewives, submissive wives and doting (to their sons only) mothers. Can't they be geared into dreaming different dreams? They don't have to be mothers and wives only. Can't they be made to see themselves as someone else too? Can't we teach girls to dream differently?"

On another plane, after years of governmental and non-governmental attempts to tackle the problem of female infanticide through incentive schemes as well as individual and family counselling, it is increasingly clear that the practice is unlikely to die unless changes are brought about in the way girls are perceived by the family and society and in the way they (who may, in turn, become mothers of daughters) see themselves. In an article some months ago, V.B. Athreya of the Centre for Science, Technology and Development Studies (Thiruchirapalli) and Sheela Rani Chunkath (IAS) who had earlier sought to empower women in Pudukottai by encouraging them to learn cycling, described their efforts to catalyse such change through the "kalai payanam" form of travelling street theatre in Tamil Nadu.

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The plays the troupe put up in various villages of Chellampatti and Usilampatti blocks (Madurai district), notorious for the practice of female infanticide, reportedly sparked off spirited discussions among the rural audience which suggested that the youth and women in particular were in favour of change. Although the article does not mention it, the impact of the plays on the self-perception of young girls watching them must have been even more dramatic, with one play focussing on a

"Even short-term exposure to the past experience of women...has the most profound psychological effect on women participants... Women's History changes their lives."

– American educationist Gerda Lerner, who held pioneering courses in women's history in New York in the early seventies.

young girl's fight for justice from the village panchayat in a case of sexual harassment, another suggesting that there is nothing wrong with daughters lighting their parents' funeral pyres since they are not only equal to sons but often show more care for aged parents, and a third demonstrating the amount and worth of women's work. In view of their belittled status in communities where female infanticide is endemic, this must be seen as a vital byproduct of these efforts.

Another illustration of the importance of self-esteem comes from studies in many countries that have apparently found that programmes to improve girls' self-esteem can even help delay childbearing! According to a recent cover story on "Sex and the Adolescent" in *Femina*, empowering women — giving them a chance and an identity apart from motherhood and giving them the skills to refuse sex if they wish — can also help ensure their reproductive health: "A young woman who knows she has options is more likely to postpone starting a family." Quoted in the article is Shanti Conly of Population Action International, who admits, "I was skeptical at first, but when I saw the power of self-esteem programmes for girls, I was intrigued. Through them they learn that they can make choices in their lives."

Of course, if an instrumentalist approach or ulterior motive guides the planning of such programmes for girls (or women), they are unlikely to achieve much more than their narrowly defined ends, if those. It is clear that the importance of self-esteem is beginning to be recognised by a wide range of people concerned with social change.

Psychologists have long understood that self-esteem is an important core of the human psyche and personality and that the absence of self-esteem can have grave consequences for individuals.

For example, in her MPhil thesis entitled "Social Identity and Personality Variables in Psychiatric Patients with Somatic Complaints," Anisha Shah, now a practising clinical psychologist at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, reports that such patients are often

characterised by low self-esteem, a feeling of alienation, a perception that life has no purpose or meaning — all of which contribute to their conviction that they are unworthy, unsuccessful, incompetent and incapable of controlling their own lives. They also perceive disapproval from the environment — which leads to further personal dissatisfaction and interferes with effective functioning. All this can result in a negative identity and self-destructive behaviour.

The point now is to recognise that the material, social, cultural and psychological realities of women's and girls' lives make them prime candidates for low self-esteem and related problems and to initiate action to enable them to develop a sense of their own worth, as well as the resilience and confidence to lead happy, fulfilling, independent lives irrespective of changing circumstances.

Adolescent girls face many problems which cannot be tackled solely by routine educational, healthcare and vocational training services. Programmes that address the full range of their concerns and problems could go a long way towards helping them to emerge as free, equal, self-respecting and self-confident citizens. This may hold the key to real, sustainable and positive change in women's lives and, thereby, in society.

Nasiruddin Haider Khan

Selected Articles :

- 1. Water-Forest-Land and the Girl Child**
- 2. The Daughter of Sido-Kanhu**
- 3. Tomorrow's Women**

Nasiruddin travelled extensively all over Bihar and established contact with a number of organizations working on women's and children issues in the region including ADITHI, one of the Foundation's partners. All his reporting on the subject is based on his own experience. Nasiruddin said "the Fellowship had been a wonderful learning opportunity for me." After his travel in Bihar visiting *adivasis* and organizations working with them, he wrote an in-depth article titled "Daughter of Sido Kanhu" where he talks about the status of the tribal women. In his introduction to the article he argues that "just the way it is important to know about the *adivasi* society to be able to understand the socio-economic dynamics in Bihar, similarly it is imperative to know about the status of the *adivasi* women to be able to have an insight to the status of women in general in the state."

WATER, FOREST, LAND AND THE GIRL CHILD

“Ten wells equal a pond, ten ponds equal a large lake, ten lakes equal a son and ten sons equal one tree”
— Matsya Puran

“Pick flowers from a tree, don’t uproot it; like a gardener in a forest and not like one who sets fire to everything”
— Garud Puran

The relationship between society and nature is an old one. It might be better to say that this relationship is ancient. It is for this reason that the proponents of a male dominated Indian society make the comparison between sons and trees. And that too where having one son is recognised as necessary for the perpetuation of lineage — there a tree is equated with ten sons.

From this we know the importance of trees in our life. Thus, it has been said in the Garuda Purana, that while the flower may be picked from a tree, the tree itself should not be destroyed. And perhaps, to make people conscious of this idea, it has been said in the Vishnu Purana that the tree is a form of god Anantadev. This is not being cited to give religious importance to trees, rather to develop an approach towards society and nature, of which a major part is constituted by trees.

But today, far from accepting what is said in the Matsya Purana or the Garuda Purana or the principles set out in the Vishnu Purana, we do not even think about this. And the tree which has been equated with ten sons is being swiftly felled, uprooted and murdered. And this violence against nature is having a direct impact on society and particularly on girl children. The link of playing with the environment — and its relationship with the issues of women — is being done by environmentalists all

over the world in the last few years. As a result, the academic debate on 'Environmental Women's Science' or 'pro women Environmental Science' has begun. This trend which emerged in the western countries, is now taking root in India, but is confined to semantic debate and discussions.

Women environmentalists like Vandana Shiva claim that in countries of the third world, women are dependent on nature. They take from nature the foundation of their own and their family's lives. That is why, the destruction of nature is the destruction of the source of their lives. Shiva claims that the neglect of women's participation in the issues of development is also the cause of the destruction of nature.

Professor Bina Aggarwal of the Institute of Economic Growth in Delhi says that to understand the relationship between men, women and nature, it is necessary to know the reality of the specific forms of their relationship with the environment. In society, there is division of labour based on sex and class (caste/race) and distribution of property and power. The relationship between people and nature is based on the structure of sex and class (caste/race) relations. That is why environmental change is also based on the same. And since experiential knowledge of nature is based on the relationship with it, the impact of environmental imbalances correspond to it.

Generally tribal girls and women are the ones who bring fuel and fodder from the jungle. And so, the impact of environmental damage affects them. Similarly, they have a daily relationship with the trees of their area. Through this they have collected a store of experiential knowledge, if the forests are destroyed, there is also destruction of this knowledge. This is not the situation with men or boys. That is why the whole of society does not have the same relationship with nature that women have.

In the Santhal Parganas of Bihar, girls or to put it better — women, are bearing the direct impact of environmental destruction. Santhal girls are having to make up with their 'labour', the scarcity created by this playing about with nature.

The relationship between Santhal society and nature is based on sex and class divisions. The responsibility of collecting food for the family lies with the girls.

Along with bringing fruit and flowers from the forest, they are also dependent on the forest for water, bamboo, herbs, grazing, leaves and manure. This is why Santhal women have a live relationship with the trees of the forest. They are the source of life for them. On the other hand, men's relationship with trees is primarily one of lifting the axe at them. This violence against nature can also be seen in the violence against women perpetrated by men.

Santhal girls are the ones who have to bring drinking water for the house. They also have to take the cattle out for grazing. Among them, it can be seen that the landless, or those who have very little land, are more dependent on nature and the nearby environment. Since they are primarily an agriculture based society - its skills or lack of skills can be seen among the Santhals. Their relationship with nature is a part of this social structure. The people here are primarily dependent on agriculture and forest produce for their food.

In the 1952 National Forest Policy, it was said that forests should cover one third of the area, but in the whole country the condition of forests is bad, it is approximately 20 per cent. The situation of the Santhal Parganas is no different. According to one figure in 1936, 66 per cent of the area was covered by jungle while now it has been reduced to just 10 per cent. In Lalmatiya of Godda district, in the first phase of large scale coal mining alone, one thousand acres of dense jungle was sacrificed.

In almost all areas of the Santhal Parganas, there has been impact of this environmental damage. In the villages of the Masaliya block of Dumka district, almost 90 per cent of the families primarily live off agriculture. The environmental imbalance caused by cutting of the jungle can clearly be seen. This directly affects agriculture. When the jungle was close by, girls did not have to go far for fuel. They were free of worry about fuel.

For the grazing of cattle too, they did not have to go far. In the months without crops, the animal droppings were left in the fields while grazing and saved as manure. Since the felling of the jungle, there is scarcity of fuel — its collection now takes up a lot of time. Every day girls spend about three to four hours on this. They have to go far to graze the cattle. In the summer days there are dangers attached to this. Apart from this, the animal droppings (gobar) earlier used for manure, are now used as fuel. This has a direct effect on the diminished quality of agriculture.

The making of plates and bowls with leaves is also the responsibility of the girls. The cutting of trees has had an impact on this work. They have to go far to gather leaves. This takes both time and is full of dangers.

The biggest impact of cutting the jungle lies in the scarcity of forest produce and water. In Santhal society, it is women's work to provide food. This is why all work related to this has to be done by them. Santhal society is agriculture based and there is an indissoluble link between water, land and the jungle. From the jungle was collected edible roots and fruit such as jackfruit, mangoes, jamun and mahua — this work was done by women. In emergency situations, when adequate grain was not available from the fields, this forest produce was useful.

Cutting of the jungle and the nationalisation of remaining forest has snatched away a major source of supplementary food from them. The brunt of this is directly borne by the girls. If there is a shortage of fruit in the house, the men are given it. Not only this, earlier forest produce was not sold. But now, because of economic distress, it is sold instead of being personally used. The situation is the same regarding water. In the Santhal Parganas there are the Ganga, Ghumani, Banski, Brahmani, Ajay and Mayurakshi rivers as also many waterfalls. Apart from this there were sources of water in every village.

As has been said in 'The environment of the Santhal Parganas' written by Nalini Kant — during the rains, rainwater would enter the earth through the roots of trees and this absorbed water

would feed the land even after the rains. The village people had adequate supply of drinking water as well as for irrigation of the fields. Whether villages lay in the foothills or in the valleys, people never had to face a crisis of drinking water. But today, with the cutting up of the jungle, it is difficult for the rivers to retain water and the water sources are drying up. Because of this, on the one hand a major crisis has already developed in agriculture — while the drinking water crisis is becoming more and more grave.

Earlier there was no crisis of drinking water. The most serious crisis of drinking water is being faced by the tribals living in the higher regions of the hills. Since water is the source of life, according to the plans wells have been dug and the Government has constructed water reservoirs. But most of them are not working. In Bansjora village, of the five water wells, four are lying useless. The burden of this situation is borne much more by the women — the girls — than the men.

Just as, to make food available is the responsibility of the girls, so also is their responsibility to make drinking water available. For drinking water they have to go afar. In the summer especially, they face difficulty. Because of the scarcity of drinking water, they even have to drink stagnant water, which brings disease in its wake. Panting of the house is a special skill of Santhal girls and their responsibility. For this too, the fetching of water — even walking many kilometres to do so — they have to do. On the road from Dumka to Pakuda, in the morning and evening, girls with water pots on their head can be seen walking a great distances.

The water crisis has its worst effect on their health. As for the Santhal men, they walk about bare bodied. In the summer, Santhal girls face severe problems regarding bathing and washing of clothes. This problem is also a source of disease. To highlight the effect of the water crisis on girls — one example is sufficient.

There is a village 'Pahargora', where only 5 per cent of the land is irrigated. In summer the well water dries up. Many diseases

spread. This has a direct effect on the girls because they do the work of fetching water. Not only this, earlier on in the ponds or small places where water used to collect - fishes were available and used by the tribals for food. Now fish is becoming scarce and more valuable. Where fish is available, girls are given less to eat. Fish is mostly given to the boys or men to eat.

The special relationship between women and nature has an effect on their store of knowledge. Because of the daily link with the woodland areas, women acquire knowledge of herbs and the ability to recognise a variety of medicinal herbs which can cure a number of illnesses. This knowledge has been transmitted from mother to daughter through generations. With the destruction or depletion of biodiversity in the jungles, this special knowledge of the girls is also being destroyed. Because of this, for many illnesses which they earlier treated themselves, now they have to go to 'Hakims' (nature care medicine men) or have to turn to the city. In this too, girls have to bear the greatest loss.

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On the one side, their special knowledge of nature is being taken away from them and on the other, the effect is being borne by them. Many of the women's illnesses were earlier treated by themselves. Now with the non-availability of medicinal herbs, they are unable to treat themselves and remain silent about their health problems. Apart from this they used to treat the ailments of their animals too with medicinal herbs. Now, for the treatment of their livestock, dependence on people outside the community — instead of the forest — has increased.

Earlier, they used to run many small forest based handicraft industries in this area, where girls were involved on a big scale. Their handicraft industries are becoming defunct. In the dying industries are primarily tussar, lac and the sewan grass based ones. The adverse effects of this is once again borne by the women.

It is clear that the entire community order of the Santhal tribals is becoming the victim of environmental imbalance - and those

who bear the brunt of this imbalance are the girls and the women. The natural imbalances brought into the community order is driving girls on a large scale to seek their livelihood away from the village. Although migration is an old problem of this area.

After the Santhal Rebellion they were sent to Assam, Purnea, Orissa, Champaran and even Mesopotamia as part of a planned strategy. After independence migration is entirely a product of environmental degradation causing imbalances. The effects and scale of migration is largest in the villages of Sahibganj, Deoghar, Dumka, Jamtada and Damin areas. Even today, in the eastern parts of the country, wherever dams or barrages are being built, not only stones but the people who carry stones — especially girls are also brought from the Santhal Parganas.

By building a dam on the Mayurakshi river which flows near the Dumka area, a 'green revolution' has been brought to many areas of Bengal. But the tribals, living on the banks of the river, have become victims of a "dry revolution." Building of the dam on the Mayurakshi has sweepingly affected the Chapuria village of Dumka. The village pradhan of Chapuria village — Vakil Murmu — said that before the dam was built, more than 200 families used to live there, but now, only 11 families are left. Before the dam was built, land was given to the displaced people in many areas but all of it was high stony land (Tadi) and the people have now scattered here and there.

The uprooting from the land has had the worst effect on girls. There are many villages with the same story. As a result today, large numbers of these tribals — of whom about 70 percent are girls — go to West Bengal for paddy planting and harvesting. The reality is that these Santhal girls are the backbone of the "green revolution" in Bengal. There is a village - Pahudeeha in the Masaliya block. In this village live 30 Santhali families. In the summer only seven old women are to be found in the village. All the houses are locked. They have all gone to bring the "green revolution" in Bengal.

According to the locals, the people of this area go to Bengal

four times. Every time middlemen (dalals) called 'Ghumashta' from the districts of Birbhum and Bardhaman come to fetch them. These people go to Padahat, Machanda, Shimla, Mukhra and Babunari. In these areas there are primarily two paddy crops - 'Agahani dhan' and 'Garma dhan'. Both the planting and harvesting of these two paddy crops is their responsibility. They are out for about four months. Since the fare and food for the journey is arranged by the 'Ghumashta', they have to work for one week without payment (begari).

As the moon sets they have to start work which continues till the sun sets. For this whole period which is about 14-15 hours, they receive approximately 25 rupees. Most of the tribals, despite the widespread literacy movement in this area, cannot add or subtract. For this area, the middlemen contractors (Thekedars) often dupes them regarding their payments. The most amazing feature is the use of small girls as labourers. Because of the destruction of livelihood in the village, the whole family has to go out to work to survive. In the villages of Northern Bihar, it is mostly men who go out to work. But here, it is the reverse. In the months of May and June, at the Dumka bus stand can be seen, not one or two, but hundreds of little girls ranging from 10-12 years to 15-16 years of age — all of whom had gone to Bengal to bring the 'green revolution'. Perhaps nowhere else have girls had to bear such a burden of environmental degradation and imbalance.

One point should be outlined — that going out to work does not seem to affect their economic condition. Despite this, they are forced to survive rice starch and that too is not necessarily available on two successive evenings.

Uprooted from the forest and land, these tribal girls can be seen working in the stone crushing industry on their own land. Uprooted from the land, these daughters of Sido Kanhu can be seen carrying sand in some places and elsewhere carrying bricks. Not only here, but in the capital Patna, large numbers of Santhal can be found in the brick Kilns.

In lands alien to them, these girls are often victims of sexual

and physical abuse. This is admitted by the local community too. More such incidents take place with the girls going to Bengal. At night, the contractors often enter their camps and make off with the girls. There is no one to stop them.

The special relationship between women and nature cannot be denied, seeing the situation outlined above. If the environment is to be saved, then the participation of women in the programme has first to be ensured. If this is not done — then in the name of social forestry, trees such as eucalyptus and acacia which cannot even be used for burning will be planted. In this area, foreign strains of eucalyptus have been planted.)

No political party, including the Jharkhand Party has either made the link between society and nature or made it an issue. It is doubtful that anyone has thought about the special relationship between girls, women and the environment. But now the time has come for it to be made a major issue.

Nature and women both give life. It is upon them that creation and society depends. Today, it is necessary to hand over the entire management of water, forest and land to women, because the nurturing care required to save them can only be given by women, who have the innate capacity for motherhood.

THE DAUGHTER OF SIDO-KANHU

Marang buru lok do, marang buru lok do,
disam lodak trelo, disam lodak badaya,
ltrak jeevi lok ram do, okoy trel titral

(A Santhal : Song)

[A girl narrating her distress says that when a big mountain burns, the whole world watches it burning, its not hidden from anybody, however when her soul burns, there is nobody to see it.]

34 Santhal society appears to be open and non-discriminatory on first sight, but actually, the 'burning souls' of the girls are concealed behind the glitter of the so called openness. Santhal society exhibits the same attitudes towards women that are seen in other non-Santhal societies. There is some difference in the social position of women in this society as compared to North Bihar or other non-Santhal peoples. Despite the revolt led by Sido-Kanhu, two years before the first war of independence (1857), against the British and moneylenders and the 'Safahor' movement of social reform, the desired changes in Santhali society did not take place. But the responsibility for this doesn't lie only with the Santhal society.

The area that took up bows and arrows under the leadership of Sido-Kanhu against the 'Angrez Bahadur' (the British) has not been able even after 140 years to join the Indian mainstream. Although there are benefits, the losses are many more. The attitude of Santhal society towards its women may have changed superficially, yet in essence it is different. In order to consider the condition of women in Santhal Society, it is necessary to keep their social, political and economic context in mind, to arrive at a realistic appraisal.

Compared to other societies, there appears to be more freedom given to women in the Santhal society. Social evils like child-marriage and dowry are totally absent. Participation of Santhal women in labour is quite advanced. Remarriage of widows also takes place. Bride money is given instead of dowry. While women do have these benefits, their days, from dawn to late nights are spent in backbreaking labour.

On the basis of the Gazetteer written by L.S.S.O. Manlay (ICS) in 1910 and the amended one written by the Deputy Commissioner of Santhal Parganas S.C Mukherjee in 1938, P.C. Roy Chowdhury wrote the Gazetteer for this area in 1965. It is this document that forms the most important medium for understanding the Santhal Society. According to it, tribal laws and tradition prescribe that women are dependent on men. As a girl she is dependent on her father. Then as a wife on her husband, as a widow on her in-laws, her father or her son and as a sister, on her brother.

Hindu religion also defines a similar position of women. Behind the apparent openness of Santhal society, it is this reality that lies. The social responsibility of girls and unmarried women lies on the father's shoulders while all domestic responsibilities are naturally given to the household women. Santhal girls are given their first lessons in duty by their mothers. From childhood they are taught that cleaning the home, de-husking paddy, fetching water and fire wood — are all their duties. Preparing plates and bowls from leaves and washing utensils is also their job.

Every village has a 'Jog-manjhi' whose task it is to provide moral education to the Santhal boys and girls. The Jog-manjhi is responsible for the moral conduct — ideas and behaviours of the youth. He is, in practise, the guardian of all young men and women of the village. In a sense he is their leader. He has to keep track of all amorous relationships. No young men can acquire a girl-friend without informing him. His role carries great responsibility. If an unmarried maiden gets pregnant, the villagers turn to the Jog-majhi to find out the father. If he is unable to locate the father he resigns his position, since he

failed to fulfill the responsibility. It is very difficult to imagine the existence of Jog-manjhi in any non-Santhal society.

Abortion is also undertaken in Santhal Society. In special circumstances it is permitted. In cases where the Jog manjhi knows of sexual relations between a particular pair who are of marriageable age but socially prevented from marrying, he can get them married off. This is unlike North Bihar where such a matter would lead to bloodshed.

It may so happen that a maiden becomes pregnant yet doesn't wish to marry the youth who is the father. She then turns to the midwife for getting an abortion done. If the midwife and the girl are caught, both face punishment.

If a girl develops sexual relations with a non-Santhal boy and gets pregnant, then getting an abortion done doesn't invite punishment. The logic behind this is that such a child would only have been hated by everybody.

Santhal Society doesn't allow women to select their husbands. Although a system whereby the prospective couple see each other and give their assent does exist, usually the parents of the girl agree on her behalf. While young men can simply abduct a maiden from the market place and forcibly perform marriage rites, a girl may not be able to marry a youth of her choice. The incidence of child marriage is negligible. According to the 1938 Santhal Pargana district Gazetteer "marriage after attaining adulthood is more or less a law in the Santhal society. Child marriage is rare and its incidence is due to the influence of Hindus."

The idea of foetal sex determination never arose in this society. The question of harassment for dowry or bride - burning doesn't arise at all. Neither does one find women who have been unable to marry for want of adequate dowry. A father doesn't feel worried on the birth of a daughter nor does he have to mortgage his pride in order to preserve his daughters honour.

Those among civilised society who refer to themselves as products of Aryan lineage, should learn from these traditions of

the Santhal people. But far from learning, they are actually teaching the Santhalis. Recently one or two incidents have come to light where educated Santhalis residing in cities are demanding dowry, although their proportion is less than one per cent. This gives rise to the fear that in striving to become modern and educated, this society may do away with its proud heritage.

Apart from this, there is another attitude visible in Santhal society, vis a vis their women. Vasudev Besra in his unpublished research has noted that Santhali women, specially married women, alone have the right to prepare materials for religious rituals, in their husband's home.

It is believed that the clan-god shall accept offerings only if prepared by them. If any one misbehaves or attempts to misbehave with such young women, the act is considered to be an insult of the clan-god. Then, the whole community practises the most drastic punishment called 'bithlaha'. Under this, the home and hearth of the culprit is destroyed. In 1993-94, several cases of bithlaha were undertaken in Godda and Sahebganj districts. Police had to intervene and several people were left injured. It is indeed rare to find such instances where a whole village unitedly rises to protest against an injustice in relation to a woman. In this society only we also come across cases of women being killed on the suspicion of being witches. Consequently, it is difficult to arrive at a clear cut appraisal of the position of women in Santhal society.

In 1954, in a village called Kirata under the police station of Mahebpur of the present district Papur, police had to open fire against a mob trying to implement 'bithlaha' against a man accused of raping a young woman. Ten people lost their lives. In our country nowhere can one find such an instance where 10 persons are killed in police firing while attempting to punish a rapist. In fact what one finds is police men, stripping Maya Tyagi naked and parading her in public.

While the Santhal society may have these qualities, yet as far as the position of women is concerned, male-dominated ideas prevail. The equality seen between men and women is clearly

because of economic reasons. It is not because of liberal or independent values that the male society grants equality to women. It is said that this is an intrinsic quality of this society. Women have less rights than men. Traditionally men have many more rights than women.

As far as work is concerned, women go out of the homestead to work. If it is for the benefit of the home, then a married women can go out and work along with any other man without any objection being raised by her husband. This is a matter directly related to economics. The number of Santhali women working as labourers is far greater than the corresponding number for any other community. Although women are in no way lagging as far as physical labour is concerned, yet they get paid less.

While women do all the other work in the fields, ploughing is done only by the men. Similarly while women do all the maintenance work of the house, it is only men who can construct or repair the roof. If a woman does so, her ears are liable to be cut off. They can't use the bow and arrow. Use of razors is prohibited for them. They are not allowed to weave cloth or cots. They can't play musical instruments, neither can they conduct sacrifices although apart from the head, they are allowed to eat sacrificial meat.

While worship material is prepared only by the women, the right to actually conduct the religious rites is confined to the men. This can be considered discrimination or a division of labour. The women only receive the anointed eatables. The annual worship is the monopoly of men. The anointed eatables from this occasion are prohibited for women. Only women who have been formally married are allowed to prepare material for worship. Widows and other women cannot do so. On the contrary, a man who has married several times doesn't lose the right to conduct worship.

The cleaning and painting of the altar of ancestors in the home is done by unmarried daughters and married ones are prohibited from doing so.

According to the unpublished research of Vasudev Besra, women have negligible participation in social administration. The manjhi baessi (head) of the village or the Pargana baessi (block chief) are always men. Any conflict in the village is resolved by all the men collecting together. The women have no role to play in this. They can only register a complaint, but not take a decision about it.

It is usually held that the women have to undertake only light work. This claim stands rebutted by the sight of women fetching water in pitchers carried on their heads or carrying fire wood or bearing upto five logs of wood while coming home from the forest.

Even after the Santhal revolt ('hool') of 1855 led by Sido-Kanhu, the area has remained backward in terms of amenities, which has a direct impact on all women. Dumka is the head quarters of Santhal Parganas. This district has been in the news due to the literacy campaign, which has been praised to no end. How much did this campaign benefit the women, how much change was effected in the attitude towards women — this is another story altogether. Bansjora, Sindurpur and Kathliya are covered under the Sidpahari panchayat which has been declared totally literate. The ground reality reveals something else - in Kathliya 38% of men are literate while only 17% of women are literate. In Bansjora the corresponding proportion is - men : 57%, women 28.22%. None of the girls have completed matriculation. 95% of the girls have dropped out after class V. there is only one girl in Bansjora who has studied upto class VI. Her father has passed away. Due to poverty she had to leave the school, but she still wants to study further.

There are many such girls. There are many other girls who have never been to school. The main reason for this is that they are more useful for house work or even outside work. To send them to schools is perceived a waste. Moreover, educating them would require resources which the common Santhali lacks. Consequently, girls are deprived of education. Those who have resources prefer to send the boys to school. Even if we accept the governmental claims regarding literacy,

it doesn't seem to have brought about any change in the attitude towards women.

While literacy is considered an important tool for empowerment, tribal societies especially Santhal girls are deprived of it. Whatever education is being imparted, is at variance with their traditional education and language. Education is thus seen to be useless. The schools are in bad shape. They are situated at long distances, they lack teachers, especially women teachers. For college education, one has to travel more than 30 kms. from the village. All these constitute obstacles for the education of girls. Till such time as real education (as opposed to literacy which teaches them to sign in place of affixing their thumb impressions) is not spread, girls are not going to realise their condition, nor will they mobilise and ideologically fight against it in their society.

In this tribal society of Sido-Kanhu, modern ideas — especially spread of education — have been undertaken by missionaries. There can hardly be any controversy on this. Due to the work done by the missionaries, a section of Santhal society converted to Christianity. These Christians got special services. They opened up to outside influence. Despite accepting Christianity, they have not yet been able to dissociate from the traditional rituals of Santhal society.

Their attitudes have also been influenced by the missionaries. Santhali Christians (Isai Hor) are more liberal in their attitude towards women. Most of the educated Santhali girls are Christians. The missionaries have special arrangements for their education. In matters of marriage and health too the Christian women are much better placed than their other sisters. Due to their education, Christian Santhali women have better job opportunities.

This is the social situation traditionally continuing which will be perceived by an outside observer. But in order to understand the real discrimination being experienced by women, one has to listen to their own thoughts.

Since Santhali society doesn't practise the same attitude as in

North Bihar towards their daughters, so the same concept of gender equality cannot be imposed here. Far removed from development, this region of Sido-Kanhu is awaiting another 'hool' which shall empower them politically and economically — as well as bring about social change. Living in the cradle of hills, the daughters of Sido-Kanhu yearn for this social change.

TOMORROW'S WOMEN

In a participatory workshop held in Samastipur, the girls responded to issues of discrimination, habits, entertainment and reasons for their status. Nasiruddin finds out more and reports.

In Bihar girls are behind boys in education. They are kept in the grip of so many social restrictions. The majority of girls do not have the right to decide about themselves like boys. They are raped, killed because of dowry. They are not only taught to stay within the four walls of the house but are questioned if they try to do anything.

But these are all outside opinions. What do girls think about themselves — to know this, would be helpful to know about their social position. Discussions were conducted with a group of 36 girls in a 3 day workshop on the basis of participatory research. Done as part of the N.F.I. fellowship, special help was obtained from the voluntary organization 'Manavi' and its secretary, Anu. This workshop was organized in Samastipur at the Aarti Jagdish Bachchi-Women's College in Shahpur Patori with a mixture of girls from Mohinddin Nagar and Patori.

This participatory research is a new method of knowing the feelings and ideas of people. Grown out of the needs of the countries of the third world. It is accepted in its methodology that people have the power to understand their problems and find solutions. In the course of discussion the feelings of people are attempted to be made part of the process of participating in ideas.

Three points were raised (1) What the girls think about themselves (2) being a girl, what is their position in the family

and society, what is the approach towards them, what are the points of discrimination that exist between girls and boys, and (3) what, in the eyes of the girls, are seen as the causes of discrimination and what would be the methods of eradication.

The workshop encouraged the participants (girls) to accept themselves as a sources of knowledge and understanding common daily thinking was given recognition and they were encouraged to link this with the process of learning. One benefit of this is that when people are inspired to learn from the knowledge gained out of their own experience, they try to make themselves capable of changing their objective situation.

General opinions about discrimination

If girls themselves say that there is no discrimination against them at home or in society — one would be slightly surprised. But this is so because girls think that if brothers are given somewhat greater importance — how is this discrimination — this is social custom and tradition. But in the course of the extended discussion, they also started thinking about it.

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One girl said there was some discrimination from birth and has been practiced by our ancestors. That is why there is a kind of habit. According to the girls, the main points of discrimination are — not getting quick permission for anything. They were frequently scolded and it was difficult to leave the house. Generally, the complaint of the girls was that they are not allowed to leave the house and go out. Most of them said at home there were differences in the care meted out to brothers and sisters. Brothers are given greater license, the girls say that if we leave the housework and pay attention to studying or want to chat for a little while, go out for a walk, then we are scolded but this does not happen with our brothers.

They have to get up in the morning before their brothers. The main reason for getting up in the morning was housework. One girl gave witness to social discrimination. "If I learn to ride a cycle then society says, she's trying to equal her brother. She is making a laughing stock of her family. If one has to go

anywhere, one is not supposed to go alone,” Another girl said “If a boy does anything, then society says it is right, but if a girl wants to do good things, society stops her. For example — if a girl wants to go out to study, she is prevented.”

One complaint about society was made by generally all the girls. That boys can talk to anyone about anything anywhere but the girls do not have any such right. They said that if a boy speaks to a girl then society cannot say anything but if a girl speaks to a boy, then society considers it wrong and defames the girl. One girl said that the brother can come and go at any time, whether night or day. But the sister does not have the freedom because the daughter is the “honour” of the family. Many girls have the desire, like boys, to learn to ride two wheeler vehicles but because of the social atmosphere, they hesitate.

Many girls admitted that the brother can watch a film whenever he wants to, but we, despite wanting to, cannot watch films. If sometime one goes to a film, then the mother or elder sister accompanies. Generally the girls said with great regret that all the housework has to be done by the girls in a family, while the work of the brother is studying, going out and playing. Some girls said that in their homes this kind of discrimination was less. They were free to study but not to go out and play. From this, it can be known that some homes are changing.

But the pace of change is quite slow.

But most distressing of all is ingraining of the habit of discrimination. To maintain differences so that it seems there is no discrimination. Just as a poor man accepts that the cause of poverty is not exploitation but his own practice or social custom, so girls also do not consider the discrimination against them a crime. One girl expressed it in this manner, “Some inequalities are there from birth, they become a kind of habit. Our approach and feelings themselves have changed.” One girl said that whenever “I feel slightly sad at being a girl because everything I do is compared with a boy” and one girl speaking of her own individual distress observed, In our society or family girls or women have no position. There are so many chains on girls that it becomes difficult to live.”

From this discussion one point comes to the forefront — There is a natural desire within girls to play, go out, talk with their friends, but because of social restrictions, they suppress this desire. This is why for the all round development of girls, these freedoms ought to be given.

What girls do in the evenings

Generally, the evening is considered the time to go out, play and rest. In the evenings alone, grounds and parks are alive with people.

This is also the time when prime programmes come on television. Entertainment or games are an important thing for the mental and physical development of girls and boys. Is this right being given equally to boys and girls? The majority of the girls said that they do not play in the evening. There are no facilities for girls to play. Additionally the social precept is that it is not right for girls to play. One of them said, “Being a girl, I cannot play any games in the evening.” If some girls do play, only games like carrom, skipping, ludo or chess, which are meant to be played inside the house are customary. One or two girls also play badminton.

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Then, when majority of the boys play, what do the girls do ? They themselves gave the answer that in the evening after returning from school or college they have to help their mother with the housework. They have to look after the smaller children. They are not even given much freedom to watch television or listen to the radio. One girl said when everyone watches television, then she does too.

What their good qualities/bad habits are :

Weighing themselves on the scales of qualities and their opposite, the girls repeated the ideas society has ingrained and specially formulated for girls. Speaking about themselves the girls placed the same widespread issues in the class of bad qualities which are generally not considered bad habits for boys.

The majority of the girls identified their worst quality as that

they laugh and talk. Laughing was considered by practically all to be a bad quality. When it was asked of them that you laugh but are not bad, so how can you say it is a bad habit, they answered that in society and at home this is what is said — that it is not good for girls to laugh, and so we also accept this.

In the eyes of the girls, their bad qualities were — not to concentrate on housework, late rising after sleep, getting angry, watching films, watching T.V., listening to songs, not to be able to tolerate wrongs, instead of housework to pay attention to outside-work and to argue when someone says something wrong.

The girls also spoke about their good qualities. These showed the deep-rooted social precepts. The majority considered it a good quality in them, that they do housework, cook food, look after children, know sewing and embroidery. To cook good food, not to eat meat and fish, to take interest in studying, to obey the parents, to know singing, to respect elders, to know drawing, to bathe, play with, dress and send children to school. These qualities are those that in the prevalent social vocabulary are the supreme good qualities that a girl can have, and it is within the boundaries of these precepts that the girls' thinking is confined — and it is according to these parameters that they try to be a good girl.

Does this mean that the girl who laughs, talks, does not know sewing and embroidery, is not able to cook well — that girl is not good or does not have quality ?

Are there any such types of precepts or boundaries fixed for boys, on the basis of which it is said that these are the good qualities and those the bad qualities of a boy. Perhaps not. Then why is there this burden of precepts and boundaries for girls alone ?

The most amazing thing was that when the order of good and bad qualities was listed, the girls quickly listed their bad qualities but when the turn of listing the good attributes came, they had to think a lot. From this it is evident that at home and in society, girls are reminded more of their bad qualities rather

than their good qualities and their work is always weighed against their bad qualities.

In the course of the discussion the point emerged that in childhood the girls used to have dreams of becoming something, but after growing up in high school and college their dreams came to nought. For example, some wanted to become teachers, engineers, nurses, police, doctors, employed, social workers and even reporters. Some girls said they could not even think of becoming something — all was dependent on the parents. On the reasons for their dreams not coming true, the girls said — because of economic conditions, obstacles developing to continuing their education, marriage at a young age, the reservation of some types of work for boys only. But the most important was, the cessation of higher education because of difficulties in arranging a match. Some girls now regretfully say that if they had studied further they would have had the opportunity to show what they could do.

From this it is clear that these girls also have dreams, it is necessary to give them the right to aspire.

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When the question of good qualities was being discussed, they identified the qualities of a good girl, the majority of which the girls did not practice themselves. For example, that girls should remain behind the veil and within the four walls of their home, should cook good food, should keep the house clean, should respect the elders. To be long suffering and compassionate — and yet in opposition to this there were a number of girls who gave representation to the newly arriving consciousness. In their eyes good girls should become independent, should have confidence in themselves, should not consider themselves weak, should fight for their rights, should stand on their own feet.

Fear is an expression of the mental and emotional condition of any individual. At the same time there is the widespread belief that girls have the greatest attachment to their fathers, but perhaps this happens in the more well to do households. The majority of the girls participating in the discussion were afraid of their fathers from childhood, later of their mothers, brother, uncle or teacher.

And now after growing up and attaining maturity, the majority of the girls are afraid of society. One girl says that she fears society because when she wants to do something, she is unable to because society has placed so many restrictions. If one does as one wishes then this society defames us. "One girl said that when we want to do something, this very society spreads false rumours and dishonours."

The point also emerged that as girls grow up, the love and affection given to them is reduced. Attempts are made to make them grow up and be mature before their time.

The girls said that permission to participate in NCC or NSS camps is granted with great difficulty. Often they are not given permission.

The reason for discrimination between boys and girls :

In the words of one girl, In our families or society when girls are born it is considered a curse. The amount spent on the education of a boy or a girl is the same. But when marriages have to be arranged, then the boy's side hold an auction like that held for the selling of buffaloes. Bids are made and the boy who gets more dowry receives a lot of respect. This is why boys are given more recognition.

In the eyes of the girls the foremost reason for discrimination was that girls are considered the wealth of others (Paraya Dhan), to educate them too much means more dowry has to be given and so parents do not wish to educate their daughters very much. At the same time they think that if the son is educated, he will give economic support to them. The religious and social belief that sons are the carriers of the lineage, not giving daughters an equal share of the property as per religious custom, to think that the daughter alone is the honour of the household, economic conditions, the idea that girls are physically and mentally weak, or this thought that girls cannot do any important work and old feudal traditions and precepts that teach girls to remain under the control of men.

Paramita Livingstone

Selected Articles :

- 1. Health Scenario in Tripura**
- 2. Courtship and Marriage in Tribal Tripura**
- 3. Women in Tripura's Socio-Economic Change**

Ms Paramita Livingstone, has been writing on the tribals of Tripura (there are 19 different sects each having their own social customs, taboos and totems.)The focus of the study has been intermarriage amongst tribals and non-tribals. She has undertaken an in depth academic study of the cultural identity of the next generation. tribal social customs and laws, etc. She's written a series of articles titled "A Transition of Women's Rights in Tripura's Socio-Economic Evolution: Problems and Solutions."

HEALTH SCENARIO IN TRIPURA

The linkages between the nutritional status, sanitation and access to health care for the tribal and non-tribal people of Tripura are analysed by Paramita Livingstone.

Though the Government of India, with direct cooperation from UNICEF, started a long drawn activity to arouse health consciousness among the people, both rural and urban, the actual result is not encouraging, specially in Tripura.

Like in other states, common people of this underdeveloped and industrially backward state rely solely upon the government infrastructure in the health sector.

Moreover, the lion's share of these facilities are in urban areas, not in the villages where 1.65 per cent of the tribals and 76.86 per cent of non-tribals live.

The Riangs, included among the primitive tribes, and others mostly suffer from ailments like :

fever (specially malaria), skin diseases, scabies, ring worm, ENT problems, problems of intestines - diarrhoea and dysentery, respiratory troubles - bronchitis, whooping cough, besides Malnutrition.

Outbreak of malaria is mainly caused due to the habit of not using mosquito nets, while drinking and using of impure water cause diarrhoea, dysentery and skin diseases.

Ignorant of proper sanitation and hygiene, the rural folk become easy prey to different parasites as a lot of them have cattle.

Lack of iodine in daily food stalls mental growth, affects the health of children, causes abortion, still birth, congenital anomalies and other diseases like goiter and retinism. It is absolutely necessary to iodize table salt.

One reason for the scarcity of iodized salt is the artificial crisis created by a section of government officials and traders.

Women and children are generally afflicted by malnutrition. Children become easy victims for not receiving adequate food besides mother's milk. Mental and physical growth are affected besides the gradual lessening of body resistance.

Malnutrition affects development of the reproductive system of women. In the long run they develop problems during the time of pregnancy.

While vitamin deficiency increases cases of blindness, a number of infectious diseases like tuberculosis, whooping cough, different venereal diseases get transmitted for lack of protective measures.

As the number of hospitals and health centres in rural areas fall far short of requirements, quackery and witchcraft take the front seat. Ignorance, lack of education go side by side with corruption in the health services.

Some reports from local newspapers give a clearer picture.

Uneducated tribal youth Kartik of Radhamohanpur village waited for two and a half hours with a hope to get his baby daughter Saharani treated, "as from a private doctor", from a government physician of Jeerania Hospital. (Dainik Sambad, 14 Feb., 1996).

Relatives of Subhadra, wife of Narayan Kurmi of Sukanta Nagar Harijan Colony, took refuge in God as she was refused admission in the hospital. (Dainik Sambad, 30 Feb., 1996)

The mobile medical unit of the Primitive Group Programme (PGP) is doing a commendable job despite several lacunae.

Though meant for only the Riang tribe (second in population among the 19 tribes of the state), the medical unit is of much help to other tribes who live adjacent to the Riang settlements.

Though the headquarters of the medical units are in Kanchanpur, Manu, Ambasa, Udaipur, Amarpur and Agartala, temporary units are also opened if the medical officers on their weekly visits face any emergency situation. But communication problem is another loophole as the villages under PGP lay scattered over a huge area.

To solve this problem, a step was taken in 1995-96 in which two persons (a man and a woman) of each village under PGP were given para medical training. They function as bridges between the villagers and the PGP volunteers.

As high as 6996 families were taken under the purview of the PGP during the last few years. If there are five to six members on an average in a family, the total number of persons benefited becomes 35 to 40 thousand.

The state government shouldered the entire expenditure of the PPG mobile medical units upto 1979-80, but after that they started receiving assistance from the Union home ministry.

Rural womenfolk still depend on the untrained nurses for child birth. Hardly any case ends up in an operation. These nurses may be experienced enough but they lack proper training.

The MMR (mothers' mortality rate during child-birth) in the state is seven per thousand, even though these midwives still use primitive instruments to cut the umbilical chord.

About 77.5 per cent pregnant women still bring their babies into the world with the help of untrained midwives. The total number of trained nurses in the state is hopelessly low - just 1507.

Progress in the cases of permanent sterilization and IUD insertion is much lower than the target. Where annual birth rate is more than 0.51 per cent, it is wise to have permanent sterilization after two or three children.

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Other contraceptives are popular, but they are not completely reliable. Chances of abortion cannot be underestimated.

Due to paucity of transport, rural patients cannot make use of the better health facilities available in the urban areas. Scarcity of hospital beds adds to their predicament. Though health centres have been opened in the Tribal sub-plan areas, non-tribals also avail facilities at these.

Another problem which adds to their plight is the deterioration of the law and order situation in the tribal areas.

Some non-governmental organizations are trying their best to arouse health consciousness.

Voluntary Health Association of Tripura (VHAT) of Agartala has taught about six or seven thousand women about the primary health factors, while providing information on environment and health to farmers and youths.

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Though only 10 to 12 doctors participated in each of the 10 training camps organized to make people know rational drug therapy, all the mental health workshops that medical officers participated in were a great success.

In case of payment, generally medicines are charged with consideration for the economic condition of the patient. Tuberculosis patients are given free medicines. As its treatment lasts long, patients become impatient sometimes and give up taking medicines. Some take them irregularly after the initial danger is over. These tendencies leave the patients vulnerable and infect others immune to medicines. The ultimate cost of treatment becomes higher.

VHAT has constructed 56 latrines and 12 wells in order to prevent water-borne diseases in Takunbari and Kanthalchhari areas. About 80 schools have also been included under the school health programme.

Ten organizations were given assistance from the directorate of health services, Government of Tripura, to help carry out the

family welfare programme. Recently, four more organizations were permitted to join.

Tribals are given financial assistance of upto Rs 5000 for medical purposes from the Directorate of Tribal Welfare. During 1995-96, the Directorate helped about two thousand tribals while about one thousand of them got assistance from SDOs and BDOs at the district level. About forty per cent of the beneficiaries are women.

The Health Department of the State Government set up medical camps every month at the villages prone to different diseases. About two lakh patients, most of them women and children, were treated in such camps during 1994-95.

In spite of all efforts by government and non-governmental sectors, not much development has been taking place in the state due to corrupt officials, unscrupulous doctors and front-runners of dirty politics.

COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE IN TRIBAL TRIPURA

The recognition of the girl as a valued human resource is reflected in the system where the groom works at the house of the bride's parents. In doing so the groom pays off the bride's parents for the loss of the labour resource that the parents sustain in the marriage. This also enables the girl's parents to judge the groom's abilities to earn his livelihood and finally to train him in various jobs necessary for earning a livelihood.

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For an age which addresses itself to the issue of women, empowerment as a crucial challenge, the position of Tripura's Tribal women offers a brilliant example.

The system of wedding varies from one tribal community to another. Matches are usually settled through negotiations between the two families. But there are other systems prevalent in different groups like exchanges between two families; marriage through courtship; marriage in which the groom settles down in the brides' family, and widow remarriage. In another interesting system, the groom works at the house of the bride's family to qualify for the marriage.

For the Kukis, the most prevalent form of marriage is by negotiations, while for the Tripuri, Jamatiya and Riang communities the other forms are more in vogue.

The consent of the bride is essential among these tribals. Child marriage among the Chakmas was unknown even a century ago.

The price for the bride or dowry in reverse, is one important socio-economic characteristic reflecting the value attached to the valued contribution by female labour at home and in fields in societies that are exclusively dependent on Jhoom cultivation.

The recognition of the girl as a valued human resource is reflected in the system where the groom works at the house of the bride's parents: In doing so the groom pays off the bride's parents for the loss of the labour resource that the parents sustain in the marriage. This also enables the girl's parents to judge the groom's abilities to earn his livelihood and finally to train him in various jobs necessary for earning a livelihood.

Among the Tripuris the actual marriage is preceded by a system of betrothal in which the length of the groom's apprenticeship at the bride's place is fixed. Marriage materialises only after a successful and satisfactory completion of apprenticeship. A failure disqualifies the boy. The eligible candidates for marriage - both bride and groom - have to be able bodied and sane.

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The groom's apprenticeship can be cut short with the consent of both the parties or by adequate monetary compensation to the bride's parents. This practice is prevalent among the Riangs and the Noatiyas.

Polygamy, though not accepted as a regular norm, is allowed when the first marriage remains childless. But before a man's takes a second wife, he has to ensure equal status and position to the first wife.

The suitor's apprenticeship system is gradually going out of vogue, as the practice had been drifting into slavery of sorts.

Among the Jamatiyas, the system has given way to the practice of the groom taking up residence at the house of the bride's parents.

WOMEN IN TRIPURA'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE

In the 10, 486,00 sq. km land of Tripura state the population density was 148.55 per sq. km in 1971 spiraling to 262.94 after two decades in 1991, to the tune of 13.15 density per sq. km. As a consequence a small section of population has accumulated wealth while the vast majority is languishing, as the state has not been able to boost the infrastructure of power, roads and communication network. The only remedy lies in rural development, hiking their purchasing power and by distributing land among the landless, for checking unequal distribution of land.

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The close relations between religion and social mores among the tribals have always made it easy for them to absorb and assimilate the influence of a higher culture. The position of the tribal women through all the social and religious transitions have remained unchanged from the position of subservience. Religious dogmas were never aimed at women emancipation. Though women have a comparatively higher position in tribal societies than their non-tribal counterparts, the influence of various religions have only obviated the rudimentary gender equality among the tribals.

The first step of gender equality in tribal and non-tribal societies would be social, economic and religious equality. And for that the call is for an awareness among the women of their quiet essential right to be equal to their men folk. Unless that mission is achieved, everything stays behind.

The definitions of ethnicity, emphasize the socio-economic

cultural stream of a group that gives it a separate identity. The varied groups were woven into a composite population primarily by the British for their administrative and commercial interests. Migration of people from the plains following communal disturbance of the 40's had brought major changes in the social and economic fabric of the area.

The people of the plains brought with them the knowledge and practice of tilling the soil and replaced the slash and burn 'Jhoom' system of shifting cultivation.

For the groups in the North-Eastern states that meant a big change. 'Jhoom' cultivation entailed a whole range of social mores and conventions for the ethnic groups of the region. The replacement of 'Jhoom' by the system of cultivation of the plains had only naturally created fissures and cracks in the traditional societies of the region.

Added to this came various administrative and developmental measures. The tribals now learnt to wear stitched outfit - a practice that was totally novel for them. They also learnt to use spices in their food. The Christian missionary activities also went a long way to bring large changes in the life style of these groups.

Despite the efforts of cultural puritans to stem the tide of change, major changes in ethnic dresses have come. There are several reasons for that. The traditional female outfits are less comfortable and less utilitarian than those introduced in the wake of cultural inroads from the plains.

Though the conservatives tried to ban the non-traditional dresses, specially for women, it could never get an acceptance. Even where traditional female outfits were retained, there were substantial adjustments with new habits of dressing. The use of brassiere is one example in point.

Gender disparity is one major factor for female illiteracy. Though the Constitution has provisions for uplift of the tribals and the scheduled castes, the progress in literacy among these sections is far from encouraging. Poverty, like gender inequality, is another contributing factor.

The difference in the male-female ratio in literacy rate is true not only among the tribals, but in the country as a whole. Of the school going children all over the country boys outnumber girls by 1 to 3 per cent.

As for the tribals, their number at the primary school level is appreciably high. But at the higher secondary level, the ratio drops alarmingly when compared with the non-tribal students. As a result the female literacy rates among the scheduled castes and tribes are only 10.9 per cent and 8 per cent respectively.

Tripura, even a century ago, had made its mark in the area of female education. But the “royal” endowment schools were in the urban areas. Tribal women could benefit little because of the town-centered education system under the Tripura kings.

Even the later day missionary schools could do little in the direction of girls’ education. In spite of hostel facilities, girls from only a small section of tribals have benefited from these schools.

The Don Bosco School at Pathurighat has 275 tribal students out of a total 320. One hundred of them are girl students.

After facilities like free education and concessional board and lodging, the member of drop-outs has significantly declined. Along with formal education, there is also vocational training in poultry keeping and animal husbandry.

Running a school at concessional rate in therefore recesses of the State is a difficult proposition. Moreover, even the small number of such schools often have to be closed because of insurgency related violence.

On the whole the number of drop outs in the State has increased due to inadequate number of schools, poverty, breakdown in the law and order situation and lack of surface communication system.

According to a study, 50 per cent of the students drop out by

the time they reach the fifth standard. The rate goes further to 65 per cent before the students reach the higher secondary level and by the middle of the higher secondary course 70 per cent of them go. A very large chunk of the drop outs are tribals and the scheduled castes.

One major problem for tribal students is the medium of instruction. In Tripura, Bengali is the language of instruction at the school level. Though the tribals can learn the language without much difficulty, it is important that they should be taught in their own language.

During the past few years, the number of girl students at secondary level has increased. But still they are much below the total number of boy students. Though the Riang and the Tripura tribes have sizable females population, the literacy rate among them is very poor.

In 1971 the rate of female literacy among the Tripuris stood at 6.55 per cent and these of the Riangs, at 1.85 per cent. In 1981, they stood at 13.97 per cent and 4.27 per cent respectively.

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The Lushais are a delightful exception. Female literacy among them stood in 1971 at 60.2 per cent and in 1981 at 63.98 per cent.

The spectacular achievement of the Lushais has been largely attributed to the work of the Christian missionaries. And that, carries a message for the authorities, spread of education is sure to touch any ethnic group. The only need is clear vision and the singularity of purpose.

Gender discrimination is embedded in all levels of society. Tripura, the tiny north-eastern state, is also echoing the rumblings of worldwide battle to undo this imbalance.

The two centuries old educational institutions, set up during the Raj days, are inadequate to embark on a full-fledged drive for combating illiteracy. Though the two town, girls' schools set up by Tripura's royal family, prove that female education was not

an alien subject in this State even 100 years back, but for the staggering number of tribals-living in remote houses — education has not been transformed into an inalienable part of their lives.

Tribals are still habitual nomads, shifting their bases. For them the children's help in jhoom cultivation is more crucial for the sake of livelihood, than indulging in luxuries like education. Considering the economic parameters, this entails opportunity cost, since these people unless given sops to join mainstream life, cannot give up their pastures. While the state government is setting up schools in villages for the mobile tribal folk, the shifting of homes hinder the process of formal schooling. For sparsely populated villages, tucked in terrains far and wide, the proposal of setting up schools for the 40-odd population in a village, causes considerable drain on the state exchequer. Added with these are insurgent activities which prove to be the stumbling block for development, welfare programmes.

60 Coming back to jhoom cultivation, the traditional way of farming on the mountain slopes, during the 1930s the former Maharaja of Tripura got the hill lands surveyed, took them from tribal chieftains and distributed among local people and non tribal farmers from plains to earn greater revenue from cultivation. The farmers introduced farming techniques of plains, made hill lands more ploughable and brought in the strains of modern agrarian society. The sops, these farmers got from royal family, was taken as a blow by the tribals who termed the practice of giving revenue to the authorities as a ploy for curbing their freedom. They vowed to stick to their nomadic traditional livelihood and excommunicated the Jamatiya and Noatia tribals for learning to plough the hill side terraces and their proximity to the new agrarian society.

Since women are marginalised in cultivation, they are economically less independent. At the same time women are large in number as day labourers, and wage-earners, as marginal workers, pseudo-workers and non-workers. This also makes their condition vulnerable in interface with male middlemen and contractors. Both economically and socially,

lack of education has also compounded their problems and they are at the receiving end both at home and outside. At home they have to do domestic chores in a traditional patriarchal tribal family.

This economic backwardness, along with the social divide is a fallout of the 1946 riots when refugees from erstwhile East Bengal (Noakhali — in Bangladesh now) were given shelter in Tripura on the plains. This was ratified in October 15, 1949 when Tripura became part of the Indian Union. The Bengalees from East were the mainstay of the education system in the State and wielded their Hindu supremacy over the undeveloped Totem culture of the hill natives. This supremacy caused a divide between the two sides.

The city-based tribal also gradually imbibed the customs of Hindu culture, dowry being one of them. The customary law and usage of patriarchal tribal society worked in the way of acquiring ancestral property. According to the 1956 Hindu Marriage Act, Hindu women are legitimate claimants of paternal property. Tribal women will be deprived of the facilities if they do not espouse their allegiance to the Hindu religion. Though the tribals follow Hindu customs they can deprive daughters of ancestral property under the garb of customary law and usage.

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Keeping the cost and time factor (for procuring the land) in mind as also the possible growth in population 2,67,847 hectare cultivated land (25.53%) can be distributed among the landless. But there are so many stakes involved here.

C. G. MANJULA

Selected Articles:

- 1. For Tender Hands, by Tender Hands**
- 2. Lives without Moorings**
- 3. Childhood Cribbed and Cabined**

C G Manjula, has, through her articles, sought to put in perspective the present status of the girl child in a society dominated by patriarchal values. Her specific area of interest during the Fellowship has been to research regional patterns of female child labour and the role of mass media and school text books, the locale of study being Karnataka. In a series of articles; "Girl Child, Unchanging Social Attitude", "Children Sweat for the Silk's Smoothness", "Innocence is Shattered", she explores the above subjects. Manjula's work is almost totally based on first hand research, most of the data she uses is primary data, collected by her through questionnaires, research, interviews, etc.

FOR TENDER HANDS, BY TENDER HANDS

Green and black glass bangles have a special place in the hearts of the women of Karnataka. The cottage industry of bangle-making, once confined to Kittur and Muragod, has now spread to many other towns. The industry, which mostly employs women and children, continues to use centuries-old technology, but faces many modern-day problems, writes C G Manjula.

The original glass bangle-making centres in Karnataka are Kittur and Muragod in Belgaum District. The Khajagar Lingayats of these two places have been engaged in bangle-making for several generations. The word 'Khajagar' means glass-making. "We don't know when bangle-making started here. But it is our family occupation. Some people say that it is 600 years old," says Rachappa Khajagar of Muragod.

At one time, only a few Khajagar families in Kittur and Murgod used to make bangles. Later, these families split into several smaller ones and some of them migrated to other places and set up bangle-making bhattis (units) there. Some people, who are not bangle-makers by caste but who learnt the art of making them while working in the bhattis owned by the Khajagar Lingayats in Kittur and Muragod also went elsewhere and set up their own bhattis. So, there are now bhattis owned by Muslims and Nayaks, besides Khajagar Lingayats.

Across the State

There are 31 bangle-making bhattis in the State. Of them, 10 are in Muragod, 6 in Kittur, 1 in Nesargi, 2 in Saundatti (all in Belgaum district), 3 in Aravatagi and 3 in Kumbarakoppa (both

in Dharwad district), 4 in Kumsi in Shimoga district and 2 in Tarikere in Chikmangaklur district.

The bhattis in Belgaum and Dharwad districts make only green bangles. In those districts, green bangles are considered auspicious for occasions like Gowri pooja, Lakshmi pooja and weddings. But in the Malnad and Old Mysore district, black bangles are considered auspicious and so, the bhattis in Shimoga and Chikmangalur district make black bangles.

The raw material for making bangles is broken bangle pieces. Bhatti owners get lorry loads of bangle pieces from Miraj in Maharashtra. The cost of a lorry load is Rs. 13,000. The transportation cost comes to anywhere between Rs. 4,000 and Rs. 5,000. With one lorry load, a bhatti can make bangles for about six months.

For making green bangles, only green bangle pieces can be used. When the bhattis in northern Karnataka get their raw material, they pick only green pieces and sell the rest of black bangle-making owner of Tarkere, it costs Rs. 14,000 to get one lorry load of non-green bangle pieces from Muragod. The black bangle-making bhattis also have to sift their raw material as sky blue bangle pieces, which cannot be used for making black bangles, have to be removed.

Sorting

The bangle-making process begins with the sorting of bangle pieces. It is mostly girls who do this work. They get a wage of Rs. 12 to Rs. 20 per day. Some of the girls go to school. Others said they had dropped out.

In a typical bhatti, about 10 to 14 people work in pairs in front of a furnace. Since bhattis are a cottage industry, it is not uncommon to find entire family doing the work when labourers are not available. In most bhattis, one can see owners working along with labourers. In most bhattis, it is girls and women who feed firewood into the furnace and put bangle pieces into it for melting. The wages for such work is Rs. 12 to 15 per day.

The most important part of the bangle-making process is to

draw the molten glass from the furnace with an iron rod and transfer it on to a stone slab with an implement called *hanige* so that it settles in a circular form. Then, the molten glass is shaped into bangles of different sizes by using a shuttle-like implement called *modi*. At first, the bangles still in the form of molten glass look no different from the cinders in the furnace, but once they cool, their real colours appear. Though the entire process appears simple, it involves a great deal of labour.

Early to work

The workers of a bhatti begin their day early, chopping firewood and feeding it into the furnace. They sometimes work till midnight. Besides working in the bhatti, they have to go into the forest, find a particular kind of black stone, powder it and use it for giving bangles a black colour. After the bangles are made, they have to be tied up in a particular fashion for sending them to the market.

The most important craftsman in the bhatti is the man who draws molten glass from the furnace and shapes it into bangles. He gets a daily wage of about Rs. 50 to 75. In a day, he makes about 2,500 to 3,600 bangles. Those who size the bangles made by the chief craftsman are paid Rs 20 to Rs 25 each. The sizing work is mostly done by girls. According to most bhatti-owners, the bangle-making and sizing skills can be learnt only if one learns them before the age of 12. Those who fail to learn by then, can never do so.

Although girls and women are involved in every stage of the bangle-making process, they are never given the chief craftsman's work. Some say that girls cannot do the work of lifting molten glass from the furnace and give it a circular shape. Others say they can learn the job but it is not good for them to sit close to the furnace all day.

The bhattis in Kittur do not employ any girls or women at all. "In our town, people don't send women to work," says K Gurusiddar, a resident of Kittur. Womenfolk of bhatti-owning families in Kittur do help sort the bangle pieces.

Firewood

The main problem that bhattis face today is shortage of firewood. Some bhatti owners of Kittur and Muragod have shifted to other places because of paucity of firewood. Two bhattis in Tarijere were closed down five years ago for the same reason. The owner of one of them was from Muragod. He has returned and started a bhatti there. Most bhatti owners barely manage to break even. They are often forced to take loans on high interest to pay wages. Sometimes, they even have to make advance payments to labourers to ensure that they come for work. Owing to firewood shortage and marketing problems, many bangle-makers have stopped production and stated selling bangles.

It is difficult to estimate the exact number of child labourers employed in bangle making bhattis in the State but it is clear that girls constitute the majority of the work force. Needless to say, they are deprived of a normal childhood. It is because of poverty that their parents send them to work. Many bhatti owners are aware that they are not supposed to employ children but the economics of their business forces them to engage them. They say the work does not require much skill and is free from serious health hazards. But those who work in the bhattis for 20 to 25 years develop eye defects, says Rachappa Khajagar of Murgod.

The employment of children in industries like bangle bhattis is violative of Section 32 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, which India signed, with certain conditions, in December 1992. India has taken the position that it is not possible to specify a minimum age for employment in all fields; however, it would try to implement Section 32 in stages.

The demand for bangles goes up during the marriage season and jatras. The bhattis in north Karnataka make bangles with a special design for the Ulavi Basavannana Jatra in January-February. The bangles are called Ulavi bangles. While the price of a string of 300 bangles is just Rs 15 normally, it goes up to Rs 30 during the Jatra.

The bhatti owners do not have proper facilities for marketing bangles. They themselves go to cities and towns, and sell their products to sethjis. While the green bangles of the north Karnataka bhattis are sold in towns like Hubli, Haveri, Gadag and Ranebennur and also towns in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, the bhatti owners of Chikmangalur and Shimoga districts sell their black bangles in places like Bangalore, Mysore, Hassan and Tiptur.

Little profit

The bhatti owners suspend production if there is a shortage of firewood and the demand of bangles is low. In such periods, the bhatti owners as well as the labourers work in their lands, if they have any. When the bhatti owners cannot find enough labourers, the firewood fed into the bhatti furnaces goes waste and they suffer losses. Owing to these vagaries the bhattis make little profit or suffer losses and go out of business.

Chikmangalur municipal councilor and CPI leader Radha Sundresh feels that the government should help the traditional bangle bhattis, which are found only in a few parts of the State, to survive. She suggests that the government should supply firewood to them from its depots at regulated rates, and create a network for the marketing of bangles. While extending such facilities to the bhattis, the government should stop them from employing children, she says.

LIVES WITHOUT MOORINGS

There are a total of 26 Children's Homes in Karnataka State. Of these 6 are exclusively for girls. Till March 1996, these Homes had 1568 boys and 704 girls. According to Juvenile Justice Act, (1986) boys under 16 years of age and girls under 18 years of age come under the description of 'juvenile'.

No sooner was she free from the dark confines of her mother's womb, the baby became a prisoner amidst the cold walls of a jail. Krishnaveni is the name given to this jail-born baby by her jail-mates. Now four years old, she knows only that world as exists in the prison cells, amidst those high jail walls.

What was the crime that the innocent baby committed to deserve this harsh punishment? She was born to parents both of whom are accused of a murder and are serving a 5-year term in the Bangalore Central Jail. And so jail-life becomes inevitable for her. It is a world sans green plants, pet animals and child comrades. A world where childhood fantasies and naughtiness remain shackled.

If this is a class of innocent childhood getting trampled under the weight of crimes committed by elders, another class is that of juvenile delinquents. Victims of systemic exploitation, deprived of love and care of a family, these destitutes have no home or people to call their own. It is such crop that is nursed at the government-run 'homes' which feed and clothe these children.

Though her wonderful, fantastic world of childhood remains restricted, Krishnaveni at least has the company of her mother. Yet if she turns six, she cannot stay with her mother in the jail.

Separation becomes inevitable. The child is sent to its relatives, if any, or is handed over to Balamandirs run by the Department of Women and Child Welfare, or to any such other recognized child care institution. Krishnaveni may not suffer this pain of separation as her mother has to serve only a five-year jail term. By the time she is six, her parents would be free.

The Bangalore Central Jail has provision to house only about 48 women. At times this number exceeds, to about 58 or 60. Yet the number of children in the jail remains countable, about 9 or 12. There are no special provisions in the jail to nurse these tender minds. The State Child Welfare Commission, chaired by legislator Smt. Prameela Nesargi, had recommended starting of a child care centre to look after the children of women under trials. During her visit to the Jail last June, Smt Mohini Giri, Chairperson of the National Women's Commission while appreciating the hygienic conditions in the jail and the general health status of prisoners had also suggested launching of a ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme) programme for the children there.

The only shelter available for the neglected, mooring destitute juvenile delinquents just free from the dark world of crimes is the government run juvenile home. These innocent lives are in a way personification of the cruel humanity which lets their tender childhood that must have been nursed with love, to go astray.

In a society where girl children are not welcome ordinarily, the fate of these daughters of problematic situations like that of Krishnaveni, is only worse. It is only coincidental that most of the unwanted children that mothers leave behind in hospitals or dump in garbage bins are girls.

Such abandoned children who arrive at the Bangalore Observation Home are left in the care of individuals or institutions coming under the purview of the Juvenile Welfare Board. In Bangalore, institutions such as Vatsalya, Ashraya, Matruchchaya, St Joseph's Baby's home and Orphan's Home come under such category. "These organizations make efforts

to get a foster parent or a home for the children,” says Rajendra Prasad, Inspector and Supervisor at the Observation Home.

Before 1986 when the Juvenile Justice Act came into force, these Observation Homes were known as remand homes. In these homes under trial juvenile delinquents, abandoned children and undisciplined children remain under intense observation of the supervisors for about 3-6 months. A Children’s Welfare Committee under the chairmanship of the District Commissioner meets once every week to decide on the cases of abandoned children. Chiefly, efforts are made to find the parents and return the children to them. In Bangalore, the Juvenile Court holds its proceedings every Thursday in the same building that houses the Observation Home.

The irony is that there is no separate Observation Home for girls in the state. The girl children under observation are kept with girls committed to Children’s Homes. The question then arises as to how observation as required by the Juvenile Justice Act is possible under such circumstances. Besides, the posts of a lady supervisor and a lady guard still remain vacant here. It may be remembered that the National Commission for Women had alleged that the production of delinquent girls in courts was often delayed because of shortage of lady police and lady guards. The V. R. Krishna Iyer committee which in 1986 conducted the first ever study since independence on women prisoners, had also stressed the lack of nurturing facilities in the country for girl delinquents. “Most states don’t even have Observation Homes for girls. Nor are there sufficient schools for such girls. A well managed Observation Home for girls is a rarity,” the Committee’s report has commented.

Analyses show that crimes committed by girl children are comparatively low in number. Most such girls are those caught stealing chains from jewellery stores, for such other petty thefts or for picking pockets. Otherwise, most are victims of exploitation by a male dominant society. Or those caught in the whirlpool of problems such as rape, sexual harassment, jilted romance, child prostitution and kidnapping. Other factors like jailed parents, alcoholic father, harassment by step-parents, too

make girls homeless, driving them to seek shelter in these institutions.

The Children's Home is the nursery for the 7-year old girl who gave witness against her mother for murdering a harassing, drunkard husband. Her mother is in jail. Kusuma of Kusanoor, now studying in 7th standard has been in the Children's Home since her 2nd Standard. She has no mother. Earlier when she was in Hubli's Children's Home, she was regularly being taken to visit her father at the Dharwar's prison. Now he has been released, and she wishes to go back home. But, she says, her father never comes to take her. She now spends her days waiting for him.

Manjuladevi of Chunchangiri, Tumkur Taluk, has scars from cuts by a scythe on both her legs. Her father struck her with a scythe he was holding when she prevented him from striking her mother, she says. She was seven then, and remembers that an 'aunty' took her to hospital. Though she can recall her father's name as 'Basavaraj', she doesn't remember who that 'aunty' was or what her name was. As she said that her father was jailed, the department has tried to locate him in all the prisons of the state without any results. The girl who failed her 8th standard exams is now learning tailoring.

But the big-eyed Parvathi of KGF is another story. She is homeless despite having both her parents. Her father, a miner married for a second time and began beating her, when drunk, for going to school and not to work. Her mother used to send her to school without his knowledge. When his harassment increased, the mother herself sought shelter for both her daughters in the Children's Home. She wants her daughters to be educated.

An orphan girl who escaped from the sexual harassment meted out by her uncle, the girl maid servant who suffered sexual harassment, the one who escaped from her lustful father and girls rescued from prostitutes' homes, the girl whose mother has migrated to Dubai leaving her an orphan — the Home has reams and reams of such heartrending stories of tiny lives

whose tender hearts can not yet fathom the burden of sorrow they are carrying.

The Children's Home has provisions for studying up to 7th standard. Those who pass 7th standard are sent to schools outside the Home. "There are 18 such girls going to schools outside," says D Manikya, Inspector, Children's Home for girls at Bangalore.

There are not many vocations for training the girls — only tailoring and crafts are taught. After 18 years of age — after 20 in some exceptional cases — the girls are transferred to State Women's Homes. Here their rehabilitation by either finding a job or by marriage is attempted.

Many girls from the Children's Home are now graduates and are employed. Some have joined the Police department. Many have taken up jobs as Anganavadi workers, beauticians or municipal workers. Except for an instance of death at the Bangalore Children's Home, of a girl from Shimoga dying due to burns, no cases of death have occurred. There are also no known instances of children running away from the Home. "The maintenance expenditure for each child comes to Rs. 500 per month," discloses Manikya.

Provision for reservation of three seats has been made in ITI institutes for training children from the Children's Home. This provision has been in force for about 5 years now. But since it applies equally to boys and girls, no girl has had an opportunity to enjoy the provision.

Attitudinal problems are quite natural in the children of criminals. Sometimes the violent attitude is more evident. "Insensitivity to society is also seen sometimes," says Sunitha of 'Janodaya' which is trying to rehabilitate women prisoners by giving them vocational training.

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The main motive behind the Juvenile Justice Act is the philosophy that children never commit crimes. It is like saying that “The King is never at fault.” The victims of societal pressures or the system, when children falter, the juvenile delinquents are initiated. In this regard, expert staff who can give due attention to implementation of programmes aimed at overall personality development of children based on scientific principles are needed.

Despite having trained and sensitive personnel disproportionate to the number of children, the Children’s Homes in the state have made good progress. Many children have found shelter. Some have returned to their own homes. In spite of achievements, many loopholes still remain to be mended. “It is important that the children merge with the mainstream and lead a natural life,” says H. D. Shivashankar, Supervisor at the Home for the Mentally retarded children.

Although children in these homes have no difficulty in getting three meals a day or two sets of clothes every year, they do have emotional deficiencies. That the children long to get away from a life in uniform, dormitories and community kitchen — and that the care of a family is better than institutionalised care is clear from many research findings. With this background, care must be taken to see that the education given to these children is neither dull nor painful. For girls, especially, creating an atmosphere that helps raise their self-esteem and not induce an inferiority complex, becomes very essential.

Besides, letting these emotionally troubled girls remain unemployed when they become adults means letting all those years of effort, the money spent and the expensive administrative set-up go down the drain.

These neglected children of the society must be regarded as national wealth. More care, in terms of love and proper guidance, is needed in making these children — who grow unfettered by the biases of caste or religion in institutions — real citizens.

CHILDHOOD CRIBBED AND CABINED

Young girls work 12 to 14 hours a day in silk twisting units in Magadi and nearby villages. Landless labourers, who do not get regular work send their children to work in these sweatshops to supplement their meagre earnings. Deprived of education and a normal childhood, these girls grow up to be stunted adults, both physically and mentally, writes C G Manjula.

74 You hear the deafening clatter of machines and loud film music as you walk along the narrow lane. If you go looking for the source of this strange combination of sounds, you will find it behind the closed doors of a silk twisting unit. You will also find young girls in faded clothes standing in a row and working on the noisy machines. You will spot one or two boys too.

This is a common sight in the silk twisting units in Magadi, less than 50 km from Bangalore, and its surrounding villages. A walk along one of these lanes makes one realise that the elegant fabric silk, called the 'the queen of clothes', carries in every thread the misery and pain of the children working in the silk industry.

'Huri Machine'

Puttalakshmi of Hosur village, who looks around 10, does not know her age. She says that she "joined huri machine" (as the twisting machine is locally called) three years ago. She says that she has not seen a school in her life. She would like to go to school, but her father, who has seven children, put her to work, taking Rs. 3,000 as advance. Her parents are agricultural labourers.

Shanthamma (10) of Rajanapalya queries, with a face brimming with hope and expectation, “It is already three years since I joined here. Will they (parents) seek admission for me in school again ?”

Manju Bai (9) was in second standard when she left school to join a twisting unit. Her father started a roadside hotel with the advance. Her other sister, cooks food at the hotel. She is reluctant to work at the huri machine. The only ray of hope she is clinging on to is her father’s promise that he would repay the advance and get her freed soon.

Magadi and its surrounding villages depend solely on rain for agriculture. And thanks to the vagaries of the monsoon, silk twisting has developed into a major economic activity of the area. Silk twisting machines entered these villages about 50 years ago. In the beginning, members of the unit owner’s family or adult labourers worked on the machines. Child labour was introduced in the industry gradually.

According to a study conducted by K S Saroja of the Samasti Trust of Bangalore, with ICDSS, a voluntary organization, there are about 10,000 children employed in the 900 silk twisting units in Magadi taluk. Around 7,000 of them are girl children. Saroja has also authored a book, *Yelegalondige Yeleyaru*, based on a field study on child labourers in Magadi taluk.

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In four stages

Silk twisting is done in four stages — winding, doubling, twisting (called ‘machine’ by the children) and rereeling. The unit, usually, is adjacent to the owner’s house. Raw silk is cleaned and twisted in these units to convert them into solid yarn which in its final form is called warp. These warps are sent to colouring units and from there to the weaving units, where they get transformed into luxuriant silk.

Children are employed in all the four stages of processing. Winding, doubling and rereeling operations are done by small girls aged between five and fourteen years. Twisting sections

are usually looked after by teenage boys. In all these operations, children have to stand continuously for 10 to 12 hours a day. The process also causes immense eye strain to the children. While handling running silk yarn, children often cut their fingers.

Mayamma of Motaganahalli says that her family would not survive if her children do not bring money from the 'machines'. She explains that it is very difficult for her to get any job, except during the sowing and harvesting seasons. It is for this reason that she was forced to send her two daughters — aged ten and eight — to the twisting unit..

Mayamma's children have studied up to third standard. "The elder daughter still cries holding her book", she sighs.

Most of the children employed in the silk twisting units are school dropouts.

Some parents do not send their daughters to work after puberty. Some girls continue to work till they get married. There are also a few married women, divorcees and widows working in these units.

Narasamma of Dubbattike village started working in these units when she was seven. Her marriage broke up as her husband started pressuring her to join another unit for a higher advance, which he wanted for himself. Narasamma is now staying in her mother's place with her polio-stricken four-year-old child.

No fixed wages

Another major problem faced by the labourers in twisting units is that there are no fixed wages. The first three months are considered the apprenticeship period and no stipend or wage is paid. After three months, Re. 1 to Rs. 3 per hour is given for different kinds of work.

But the wage pattern differs from place to place. "In Motaganahalli, you don't get as much wage as you get in Magadi", says M H Anhanappa, a former vice-president of

Mataganahalli Gram Panchayat. The first twisting unit came to Motaganahalli village, 15 km from Magadi, about 20 years ago. Now a village with a population of about 2,000, it has ten units. Children from the surrounding twelve villages come here for work.

Though the children work for about 10 to 12 hours every day, standing all the time, their wages hardly reach Rs. 150 per week. During the power cuts, or whenever the owner finds it necessary — the girls are made to do house work such as washing utensils, sweeping and carrying water. These children do not get even a day's holiday in a week.

No holidays

The children work half a day even on Sundays and the weekly wages are paid on that day. In most cases, the father or the mother comes to collect the money. Very few children collect their wages themselves. In some units, children are even asked to do night shifts and there is no additional allowance for this shift.

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The owners of the twisting units agree that they make about Rs. 5,000 a week. They also complain that securing a fair price from the traders at Bangalore for their product is quite difficult. If the work is not properly extracted from the children, the profit margin dips low, they argue.

Besides being forced to stand for hours, child labourers work in hazardous conditions. They work in cramped places without proper ventilation, and amidst the sound of machines and loud film music played in the units. Children, as a result, are prone to painful legs, lung infection, head ache, ear ache and eye problems. Many types of skin diseases due to silk allergy are also common among children working in the units. According to Dr Narasimha Murthy of the Government Ayurvedic Centre, the common complaint with which people come for treatment are itching, boils and gastric problems. Girls attain puberty at the early age of 10 to 11 years and suffer heavy menstrual bleeding and cramps. Many girls are also anaemic.

But once caught in this vicious circle of wage advance and debt, children seldom manage to escape from the bondage. The practice of shifting the child from one unit to another for a higher wage advance is also common here. When the elder daughter is married off, the younger one joins the unit, to clear the debt taken by the father to meet the marriage expenses. Thus, all the children of the family get entangled in the trap.

When they grow up, these children, who do not have any kind of education or professional, are faced with a bleak future. What they have learnt in the twisting units is of no use since the units employ only children. They remain crippled, both physically and mentally.

The Samaja Seva Samathi, under the chairmanship of freedom fighter M Rangappa, has attempted to start a centre for these children under the name of Dudiyuva Makkala Vikasa Kendra at Motaganahalli. "About 30 children used to attend a night school run by them", says R Ravindra of the Kendra. "But due to non-cooperation of the neighbours, twisting unit owners and parents, children no longer attend the school", he adds with regret. "We made several pleas to parents not to send their children to work. But all the attempts went in vain. Also, there is no attempt by the government to implement the Child Labour Prohibition Act," says Kalpana Shivanna, a former member of zilla panchayat.

"As the units are usually adjacent to the owners' houses, it is difficult to locate child labourers working during investigation. They send the children away and claim that the family members are working at the units, making it difficult for us to book cases," claims a labour department officer at Magadi.

The Samashti Trust and other local voluntary organizations have been making attempts to create awareness through their persistent campaigns. They have also started release and rehabilitation work. Recently, about 20 child labourers were released and sent to school.

Appendix

List of Articles by:

- 1. Ammu Joseph**
- 2. Nasiruddin Haider Khan**
- 3. Paramita Livingstone**
- 4. C. G. Manjula**

The complete set of the articles written and published, as appended, during the course of the 1995-96 fellowships by all the Four Fellows have been translated into English. They are available to Researchers, Planners, Media persons and Organisations working on the issue of Girl Child. Please write to the Foundation for copies.

LIST OF ARTICLES BY GIRL CHILD MEDIA FELLOWS 1995-96

Ms Ammu Joseph (Series of articles)

1. Give Them Your Attention, Sunday, October 13, 1996 in The Hindu, Madras (English)
2. Focus on the Adolescent Girl, Sunday, October 20, 1996 in The Hindu, Madras (English)
3. The Way They See it, Sunday, October 27, 1996 in The Hindu, Madras (English)
4. The Burden of Being a Girl, November 2, 1996 in The Hindu, Madras, (English)
5. Is Education a Liberating Force?, November 9, 1996 in The Hindu, Madras (English)
6. Much Ado about Adolescent Sexuality, November 16, 1996 in The Hindu, Madras (English)
7. The Sati Syndrome, November 23, 1996 in The Hindu, Madras (English)
8. Whose Choice is it Anyway?, November 30, 1996 in The Hindu, Madras (English)

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Nasiruddin Haider Khan

1. Aadhi Abadi ka Safar, April 20, 1996 in Hindustan, Patna (Hindi)
 2. Jal-Jungle-Jameen aur Ladkiyan in June 30, 1995 in Hindustan, Patna (Hindi)
 3. Aaj ke Bachon ke Naam, November 11, 1995 Hindustan in Patna (Hindi)
 4. Yeh Apne 'Chachha' ko Nahi Jante, November 11, 1995 in Hindustan, patna (Hindi)
 5. Aane Wale Kal ki Mahilayen, March 9, 1996 Hindustan in Patna (Hindi)
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6. Kya Hona Chahiye, March 9, 1996 in Hindustan, Patna (Hindi)
 7. Manyatayan-Avdharnayan : Sach ya Jhoot?, March 9, 1996 in Hindustan, Patna (Hindi)
 8. Jeevan Chakra ko Samjhne ke Liye, July 6, 1996 in Hindustan, Patna (Hindi)
 9. Santhali Ladkiyan Sampatti par Kitna Haque?, July 6 in 1996, Hindustan, Patna, (Hindi)
 10. Sidhho Kanhu ki Betiyan, July 6, 1996 in Hindustan, Patna (Hindi)

Paramita Livingstone (Series of articles)

1. Evolution of women's Rights in Tripura : Problems and Solutions - 1, January 10, 1996 in Dainik Sambad, Agartala (Bengali)
 2. Evolution of women's Rights in Tripura : Problems and Solutions - 2, February 12, 1996 in Dainik Sambad, Agartala (Bengali)
 3. Evolution of women's Rights in Tripura : Problems and Solutions - 3, March 3, 1996 in Dainik Sambad, Agartala (Bengali)
 4. Evolution of women's Rights in Tripura : Problems and Solutions - 4, April 11, 1996 in Dainik Sambad, Agartala (Bengali)
 5. Evolution of women's Rights in Tripura : Problems and Solutions - 5, June 1, 1996 in Dainik Sambad, Agartala (Bengali)
 6. Evolution of women's Rights in Tripura : Problems and Solutions - 6, July 31, 1996 in Dainik Sambad, Agartala (Bengali)
 7. Evolution of women's Rights in Tripura : Problems and Solutions - 7, August 17, 1996 in Dainik Sambad, Agartala (Bengali)
 8. Evolution of women's Rights in Tripura : Problems and Solutions - 8, September 17, 1996 in Dainik Sambad, Agartala (Bengali)
 9. Evolution of women's Rights in Tripura : Problems and Solutions - 9, October 5, 1996 in Dainik Sambad, Agartala (Bengali)
-

C G Manjula

1. Henuu magu, Badalagada Samajika Dristi, December 3, 1995 in Prajavani - Saptahik Prajavani (Kannada)
2. Reshme Nanupige Yelegara Bevara, January 1, 1996 in Prajavani - Sapthahika Puravani (Kannada)
3. Nucchu Noorayithu Mugdathe, March 3, 1996 in Sudha (Magazine) Weekly (Kannada)
4. Shalege Bale, Pragathigehadi, September 9, 1996 in Prajavani - Karnataka Darshan (Kannada)
5. 'Yele' Thappida Yelegara Baduku, September 15, 1996 in Prajavani - Sapthahika Puravani (Kannada)
6. For Tender Hands, by Tender Hands, November 8, 1996 in Deccan Herald - Spectrum (English)
7. Asamanatheya Pala Heluva Palya Pusttakagaiu, November 11, 1996 in Prajavani - Sapthahika Puravani (Kannada)
8. Childhood Cribbed and Cabined, December 12, 1996 in Deccan Herald - Spectrum (English)

Appendix

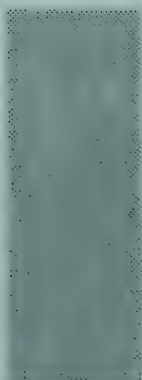
Profile of Media Fellows

1995

- 1. Ammu Joseph**
- 2. Nasiruddin H. Khan**
- 3. Paramita Livingstone**
- 4. C. G. Manjula**

1996

- 1. Mamta Jaitly**
- 2. Nivedita Jha**
- 3. Sharmila Joshi**
- 4. Meena Menon**



A glimpse of the profile of the Fellows shows the variety and richness of experience that these Fellows bring to the Programme. Their research and analysis are indepth, original and experiential study of the issues covered. Language/region is not a barrier to their field based research.

PROFILE OF MEDIA FELLOWS

1995

Ammu Joseph

Freelance Writer and Consultant, Bangalore, Karnataka

Ammu has degree in Public Communications from Syracuse University, USA and has been writing on the issues relating to women and children. The main issue that she addressed in the course of the fellowship was self-image among young girls in the four southern states of India. She believes that it is important to evolve strategies to psychologically empower the girl child while simultaneously dealing with the more obvious, often lethal, impediments in her path to do so. However, it is necessary to understand the complex set of factors that can encourage or discourage the development of a positive self-image among girls.

Nasiruddin Haider Khan

Dainik Hindustan, Patna, Bihar

Nasiruddin has a post graduate diploma in mass communications from the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi and has worked as Sub-editor with Rashtriya Sahara. Presently he works with Hindi Hindustan. Recipient of the Saptahik Hindustan Award, he has written extensively on issues concerning the girl child. The main focus of his writing during the fellowship was to study the discrimination against girl child because of socio- religious norms and values. He

also interacted with various communities in Bihar and carried out a comparative analysis of preferences for a male or female child in tribal and non-tribal societies, religious biases and the girl child, and the girl child in the flesh trade.

Paramita Livingstone

Dainik Sambad, Agartala, Tripura

Paramita is a graduate from the Scottish Church College, Calcutta, and works as Sub-editor with the Bengali Daily Sambad. She has written on female foeticide and girl child issues for the paper. She has concentrated on the tribals of Tripura where 19 different tribal sects, each with their own social customs, taboos and totems, live. The focus of the study was on the educated tribal girls married to non-tribal boys and educated non-tribal girls married to educated tribal boys. She made a critical study of the cultural identity of the next generation, the problems of inheritance vis a vis the Hindu Successions Act, 1956 and the Indian Succession Act, 1925, tribal social customs and laws.

CG Manjula

Daily Prajavani, Bangalore, Karnataka

Manjula is a post-graduate in English and also holds a degree in library sciences from University of Mysore. She has been working as a Sub-editor and reporter with Prajavani, a Bangalore based Kannada daily. The main objective of her study during the fellowship was to put into perspective the present status of the girl child in a society dominated by patriarchal values. She researched on regional patterns of female child labour and the role of mass media and school text books. She focussed her research on Karnataka.

1996

Mamta Jaitly

Ujala Chadi, Jaipur, Rajasthan

Mamta is a post-graduate in History. Since 1993 she has been editing and publishing *Ujala Chadi*, a registered newspaper in Hindi for neo-literates. As an activist she has given leadership on issues of violence against women, especially the Bhanwari Devi case. Some of the issues that Mamta will study include reghettoisation and the Muslim girl in Jaipur : the aftermath of communal riots, dalit girls in rural Rajasthan, declining status of girls among Meo peasants, changing self-image of child sex abuse victims, child marriage, declining sex ratio, etc. She will research in Rajasthan and write in Hindi.

Nivedita Jha

Rashtriya Sahara, Patna, Bihar

Nivedita, a post-graduate in Political Science from Patna University, started her career as a sub-editor with *Aaj* in 1989. She is with *Rashtriya Sahara* since the last four years and the only woman reporter on field assignment in Bihar from her paper. Nivedita will focus on issues of health, child labour and flesh trading. Through her in-depth study, she will analyse the present status of the girl child involved in flesh trade, status of sex abuse in girl child labour and changes in the ways they are exploited. Geographical area of her study will be Muzaffarpur, Munger and Bhagalpur in Bihar and will write in Hindi.

Sharmila Joshi

Women's Feature Service, Mumbai, Maharashtra

Sharmila is a graduate in English Literature and has a Diploma in Journalism from Xavier Institute of Journalism. She has 11 years of experience is currently

a special correspondent with Women's Feature Service. Sharmila's study will be on girl child labour with the current situation, its impact on the mental, physical and social health on the girl child, her family and society in a public policy context. Geographical area of the study is Bombay and rest of Maharashtra. She will write in English.

Meena Menon

Freelance, Mumbai, Maharashtra

Meena is a post-graduate in English and French. She has worked from 1989-95 with Times of India, with Business India TV and as Managing Editor, Humanscape. Presently she is freelancing. Meena will focus on the issue of rising number of young girls being sold into prostitution, the reason behind it and explore the possibilities of rehabilitation and prevention by the State. Other issues of interest are girl children living on the street, female foeticide, etc. Her study will cover Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and the Metro cities. She will write in English.

THE AUTHORS

- **Ammu Joseph** has a degree in Public Communications from Syracuse University, USA, and has been writing on issues relating to the women and children. She is a freelancer at present. She writes in Hindi for the column "Space Out". She has also written some book reviews like "Two Years On" on behalf of Mahila Samakhya and "Pre-Beijing Jakarta Conference" on behalf of Coordination Unit.
- **Mr Nasiruddin Haider Khan** has a post graduate Diploma in Mass Communications from Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi. At present he is with the Hindi language newspaper *Dainik Hindustan* in Lucknow. He has also worked as a Sub-editor in Rashtriya Sahara.
- **Paramita Livingstone** is a graduate of the Scottish Church College, Calcutta. She is a Sub-Editor with the Bengali daily, *Dainik Sambad* in Agartala.
- **C G Manjula** is a post graduate in English and also holds a degree in library sciences from University of Mysore. She has been working as a Sub-editor with *Prajavani*, a Bangalore based Kannada daily.

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Giving Voice to the Unheard for 1995 were Ammu Joseph (English), Nasiruddin Haider Khan (Hindi), Paramita Livingstone (Bengali) and C G Manjula (Kannada). A Selection of their writings have been made available to the readers in English in this book.



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